

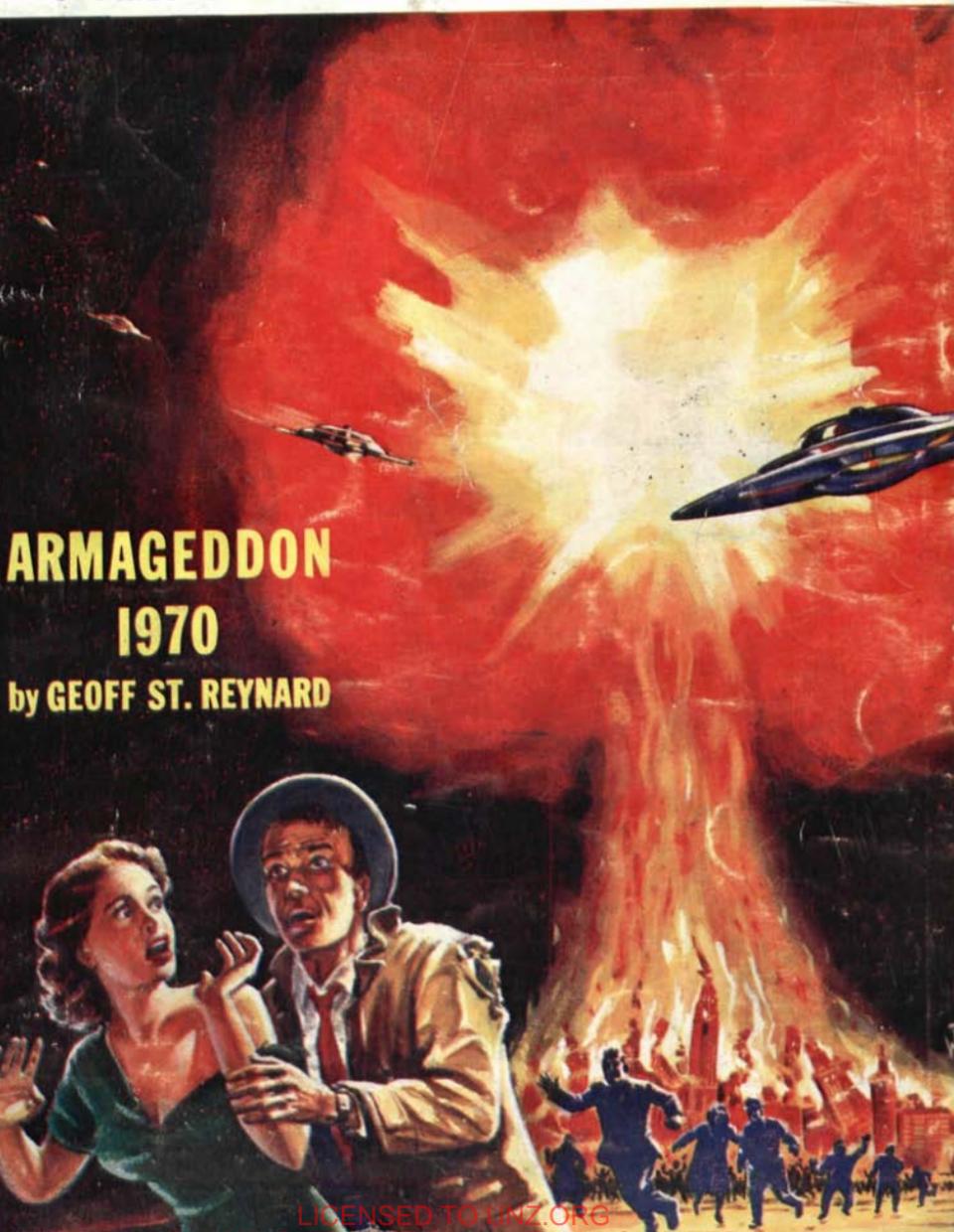
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# IMAGINATION

OCTOBER, 1952

35c

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY



## ARMAGEDDON 1970

by GEOFF ST. REYNARD

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# Introducing the

# A U T H O R



★  
*Mack Reynolds*



ONE or two wars ago I found myself hanging around New Orleans waiting to be assigned to a ship. As you know, killing time isn't murder, it's suicide, but we all, at one time or another, find ourselves doing it.

All right. So I spent a lot of time in the New Orleans library and one day reached my hand up and plucked from its shelf a copy of *Writing and Selling* by Jack Woodford.

The first sentence that hit my eye went: "Anybody who can read without moving their lips, can write stories that will sell to the American magazines."

Now, my lips had moved only slightly in the reading, so I said to myself, *He must mean me.*

I went home and blew the dust off the portable and took a crack

at writing a short-short detective yarn.

I know, you think I'm a liar, but that first story sold to *ESQUIRE*. You'll start believing me again when I tell you that I've never sold a slick since. Worse luck.

The war stepped in then and I wasn't able to pursue my new found ambitions for some years.

Eventually, however, I acquired the three necessities for becoming a writer—a pipe, a tweed coat, and a wife who works. I wrote for six months, full time, before making my first science fiction sale to *PLANET*. The story, by the way, has not as yet appeared in print . . .

About then the New Orleans heat drove us up to the mountains of Taos, New Mexico, where we

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Front cover painting by W. E. Terry, illustrating a scene from, "Armageddon, 1970."  
Interior illustrations by W. E. Terry and H. W. McCauley  
Astronomical photograph, back cover, courtesy Yerkes Observatory.

Published monthly, except March, July and November by Greenleaf Publishing Company, 1426 Fowler Avenue, Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Address all manuscripts, correspondence and subscriptions to **IMAGINATION**, Post Office Box 230, Evanston, Illinois. We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. To facilitate handling the author should enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope. The names of all characters that are used in stories are fictitious; any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Subscription rates: 12 issues \$3.00 in U.S.A. and possessions. All other countries, \$3.50. Advertising rates furnished upon request. Copyright 1952, Greenleaf Publishing Company.

# The Editorial

**F**LYING Saucers are making the front pages again. We've noticed in the Chicago newspapers that local residents have been seeing the elusive phenomena practically every night recently . . . and according to the various wire services this is true of most of the country.

**W**E mention this because our lead novel this issue concerns the saucers and while we don't aver that Geoff St. Reynard's explanation for them (and resultant warning) is the "inside" truth, we do have a feeling it could be . . . One thing we are certain of: the saucers are not fiction or of Earth origin. We base this flat statement on a number of facts: if the saucers were a military secret of ours—or any nation's—they have proved to be the least secret of any technological development during this century; while many people could be mistaken in what they "see" in the sky, too many reliable witnesses have reported them; the speeds and maneuverability at which they have been clocked and observed go beyond our present technical achievements; our government has evinced more than a casual interest in reports concerning saucers; and to us a telling point—the saucers' numerous appearances over crowded urban areas bespeaks curiosity, the kind of curiosity an extra-terrestrial visitor might exhibit. If you extrapolate on this last point you come up with an interesting question: after their curiosity is satisfied, what next? This of course postulates

other questions: Are they friendly? If so, are they endeavoring to ascertain whether we are? Or, are they unfriendly—scouting us preparatory to military action?

**P**ERHAPS none of these questions will ever be answered—it is possible that the saucers will "tire" of cruising through our atmosphere and suddenly vanish for once and for all; we doubt this. Sooner or later we'll know . . . and we trust it will not be as ARMAGEDDON, 1970 purports. God help us all if it should be! Getting back to more mundane matters, our attention is called to Howard Browne's editorial in the August issue of AS. In attempting to reply to our question in the July Madge, (why Z-D departed from its policy of not using reprints) HB failed to answer the question, philosophizing instead on the merits of reprints in the magazine field. He pointed out that "without reprints Shakespeare's work would have disappeared three centuries ago . . . and . . . the Bible would be as rare as the Book of the Dead."

**L**OOSELY using the term, the above is true; however we would like to point out that Shakespeare and the Bible are "book" trade and as such go into "new editions", not reprints—which term is more specifically applied to magazine publishing today. Also, it would appear somewhat presumptuous to mention Shakespeare, the Bible, and a science fiction magazine in the same breath

for analogous comparison.

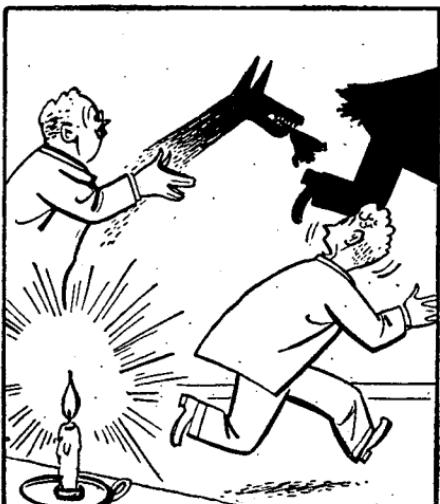
**H**B defended reprints, generally, stating: "We'd like to point out to our erudite colleague (slang for wise-guy in the same racket) that 'reprint' is not synonymous with 'leprosy'." In the case of *books* we heartily agree for new editions keep the classics alive; in the magazine field, however, reprints are a leprosy for use of them narrows a writer's market and opens the door to cut-throat publishing, since reprints are seldom purchased at standard word rates—and many are available free of charge because of expired copyright . . . We contend that reprints in the magazine field are nothing more than literary larceny wherein the writer suffers and the reader is forced to plunk down 35c for a story he has certainly read—if indeed it is a "classic" as advertised by the Editor, in which case it can be easily secured at the nearest public library . . .

**H**B concludes his philosophizing by pointing out "... the editor who decides what he thinks his readers *should* read—an editor without elasticity—is the editor who ends up as pall bearer for his own magazine." We concur 100% with this summing up. We'd only like to add that any editor guilty of the above is in reality the "wise-guy" mentioned earlier. He certainly will end up putting a wreath on his masthead. We have attended a few such wakes—but only in the role of a sympathetic friend . . . which maybe makes us pretty wise after all . . .

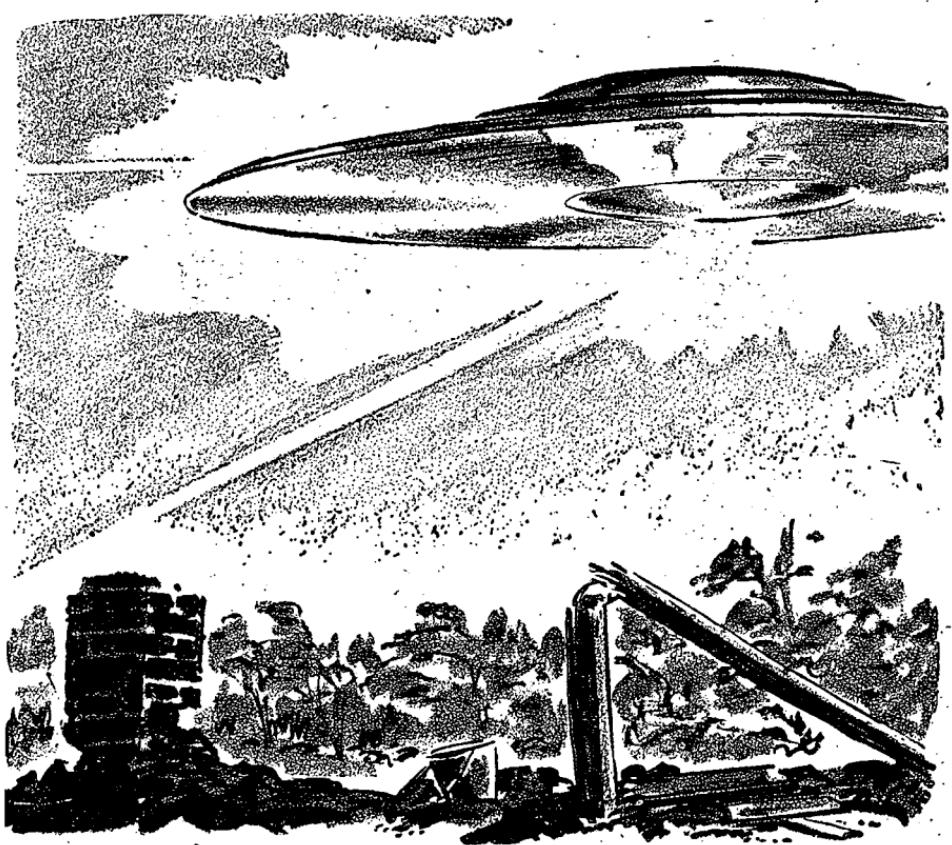
**S**INCE this issue goes on sale a couple of weeks before the World Science Fiction Convention (Chicago, the Morrison Hotel, Labor Day holidays) we'd like to give you a last

minute reminder to be there . . . you'll have the science fiction time of your life. Try and make it.

**N**EXT issue (on sale September 30th) marks a first appearance in Madge of an old friend of yours—S. J. Byrne. "Stu" became a top favorite stf writer a few years ago when AS was edited by Ray Palmer. We note that Ray has recently published some of Byrne's work in his own magazine, *Other Worlds*. The lapse in production from Byrne during the past few years stems from his being out of the country down South Pacific-way. We're glad to welcome him back by presenting a new novel, written especially for Madge, **CHILDREN OF THE CHRONOTRON**. We'll be anxious to get your reaction to this novel so drop us a line as soon as you read the story. Incidentally, Malcolm Smith painted a beautiful interplanetary cover for the story, so look for a double treat . . . . . wh







# ARMAGEDDON, 1970

*By*

*Geoff St. Reynard*

**As atomic weapons from space laid waste  
Earth's cities, Alan Rackham searched for the  
traitors. Was it possible he sought himself?**

**T**HEY tried to kill Alan Rackham about an hour after he had seen the accident. They

bungled the job. They shot at him from ambush—with an ordinary automatic pistol—as he was walk-

ing up to his house; and Brave, who had a sixth sense for danger which never failed him, knocked Alan over at the very instant of the shot and sprawled across him, a great solid shield holding him down and protecting him despite his angry wriggles. Brave's grenade pistol was in his hand before the two of them hit ground, and he sent four quick shots at the bushes, spaced so that the tiny hot fragments tore hell out of thirty yards of shrubbery. Nobody yelled or groaned. Brave waited a full minute, and then he rose cautiously, so that Alan could sit up and brush himself off and swear as he spat out dirt. They went into the house and Alan reported the assassination attempt to his immediate superior, Dr. Getty. After that they didn't try again to kill Alan for a long time.

The accident had been uncanny. It happened in the room where the shells of the silver-colored disks were fitted together and welded, before they were sent to the gargantuan baths that half-melted them again to rechill them into solid masses of metal which nothing short of a direct hit by a blockbuster would crack.

A welder, using one of the newly-developed torches that made the old ones seem like match-flares by comparison, dropped it accidentally. Its flame licked up and sprayed across the man's right hand. It melted the protective glove like ice cream on a stove; crisped away the skin and liquefied the flesh, charred the

bones black and left the welder no more than half a palm and two fingers before he could jerk his hand out of the terrible blast of fire.

Alan and Brave were standing about twelve feet off, and there could be no mistake as to what they saw then.

THE welder turned off his torch with his left hand; he held the remains of his right before his face, turned it and stared at it (the blood coursing in little sluggish streams down the forearm, the charcoal that had been bone sifting off into the air, the flesh a greasy yellow-red mass like candle drippings), and he shook his head slowly, an expression of annoyed mortification on his face. It was as though he had cut himself while shaving, no more. He was simply piqued, when he should have been shrieking with horror and unendurable pain.

Alan and Brave ran to him. "My God, man," said Alan, shaken, "let me get you to infirmary."

The welder stood up. "That's all right, Dr. Rackham. I can go myself. This don't hurt." And then a curious look spread over his face, as if he had just recollected a lesson taught him long ago. "It don't hurt *much*," he amended. "I guess it's cauterized so bad I can't feel it yet. Don't you worry, sir, I can make it."

He walked away, perfectly steady, carrying the almost destroyed hand

in front of his chest; and Alan was so dumbfounded he let him go.

The welder never reached the infirmary. No man saw him again, alive or dead.

So an hour thereafter someone took a shot at Alan Rackham. Since Brave had witnessed the accident too, and because neither of them could account for the shooting except in connection with that strange accident, it seemed stupid and pointless for an attempt to be made on Alan's life alone; especially when a grenade pistol, one of those lean evil handguns developed in 1959, would with one shot have cut an eight-yard-wide swath in everything before it and eliminated both of them. But there it was. They shot at Alan with an automatic—the bullet nicked across his chest and spoiled a blue coat that was practically new—and then they disappeared.

Alan's house, which he shared with Brave, was a four-room brick atop a knoll on the outskirts of the colony. It was a perfect bachelor establishment; the precipitron kept it free of dust and Brave's innate neatness overcame Alan's careless disregard of surroundings to the extent that dirty socks and unpressed trousers were not often to be met with lying in corners or hanging over the backs of chairs. Brave was a good everyday cook and Alan occasionally took a couple of hours off to chef up a New Orleans style banquet for two. The living room was lined with books and the plastiglass-

ed-in lounging quarters in the rear held racks of pipes and a well-stocked bar. They were very comfortable there. It was only a ten-minute walk from Alan's laboratory, and four minutes' ride from the center of the colony.

The colony was called Project Star. It was located on Long Island, protected much as Oak Ridge had been in the '40s and '50s, and Project Bellona in the early '60s; with electrified fences, and soldiers carrying the latest weapons, and a ring of grotesque machinery all around it, comprised of radar detectors and great ack-ack guns and a number of generators that threw up a kind of primitive, partly-effective force field. The force field would stop any aircraft or at least cause it enough trouble to slow it down for the ack-ack.

Of course the artificial satellite, Albertus (named in honor of Dr. Einstein), kept a watchful telescope on Project Star. But in that year of 1970 it seemed to most men that all the caution and secrecy was overly dramatic. After the collapse of Soviet Russia a decade before, from internal causes precipitated by the successful fixing of the American-controlled satellite Albertus in the heavens, and after the almost Carthaginian peace imposed on Argentina when its dictator A-bombed London, the world had quieted down considerably. America was top dog in the nations and her supervision of the science of

other countries left little possibility of successful attack or even of effective sabotage within the many colonies which worked on advancements in weapons and other civilized phenomena, and on space flight.

NEARLY everyone believed that the purpose of Project Star was to construct "flying saucers" (the inadequate name had stuck through the years) for use in reaching out to the other planets. Only the men who were working there, and a few others in government and in the military forces, knew that the disks were not intended for extra-terrestrial flight—there were rocket projects galore for that—but for journeys in the atmosphere or slightly above it, at speeds incredible even in 1970. The name Project Star had not been chosen to mislead anyone, but it had done so and nobody bothered to correct the impression. Secrecy had become an ingrained national habit in the past thirty-odd years.

Dr. Alan Rackham was one of the scientists who worked on the problem of fuel for the disks. He was not a member of the vastly important handful who headed the colony and came equipped with everything sacred and untouchable except halos, but he was considered of enough consequence to rate a house of his own and an assistant who was also an efficient bodyguard. This was Brave, whose proper name was John Kiwanawatiwa.

Brave sat down in his own chair, a sturdy specially-built job, while Alan called Dr. Getty on the visi-phone to report the shooting. Brave never sprawled out or slouched as his superior did. He sat straight, a red-copper-colored man built to the scale of a Greek statue, about half again life size. His arms and legs were tough as cable steel, his chest a brawny barrel. He was a Navajo Indian, but his features were more nearly those of a Sioux: a great finely-formed crag of a nose, thin straight lips over white teeth, dark eyes that a hawk might envy their piercing power, a wolf-trap jaw. His speech was that of an M.S. of Carlisle and Oxford, except when he spoke with people he did not know or like; then it became a parody of the nineteenth-century storybook red man's gutteral discourse.

At times, when he went with Alan to meetings of the hierarchy (a few of whom, including Dr. Getty, he cordially detested for their bland self-importance), he even wore a bedraggled chicken feather sticking upright in his black hair, stood behind Alan with folded arms and a fierce expression and confined his remarks to "Ugh" and "Waugh." This gave both Alan and himself a great deal of innocent pleasure.

For Alan Rackham was also a rebel against stuffiness and conceit. He was a perfectly normal-looking man, of slightly more than middle height, thirty-one years old, handsome enough if you liked lean bony fea-

tures and unruly brown hair; his muscular development was so unobtrusive that no one ever guessed he had been a Marine and won himself a DSC in Argentina. He enjoyed his work at Project Star, for he had a scientist's inquiring mind; but he liked even more the huge Indian with whom he lived, the girl in the metallurgy section who wore his engagement ring, and the book of rather impudent philosophy on which he worked during his free evenings.

He also loved a long drink, a thoughtful pipe, an involved practical joke, and the moody Siamese cat, Unquote.

NOW he turned from the visiting phone, as the image of Dr. Getty faded out on its screen, and he frowned at Brave. "Son," he said, "why would anybody take a potshot at me?"

"What does Doc Pomosity say about it?" rumbled the Indian.

"Mainly blah, blah, blah."

"Naturally," nodded Brave. "You know, sagamore, I think it's that accident. There was something cockeyed about it . . . I don't care how shocked the fellow was, or how quickly the flame seared up and anesthetized the wound; there should have been plenty of pain in that hand. And he didn't even yip when it happened. He only looked peeved."

"Getty says he never got to infirmary. No one has seen him at all."

"Cockeyed," said Brave again. "The whole thing's a muddle." He stared at Alan. "Boss, I have an instinct that warns me we're in for trouble."

"That's an instinct? When I get shot at, this gives you an instinct?"

"The noble red man has an instinct," said Brave imperturbably, "which sits in his belly and beats on a tomtom when trouble's coming. I don't mean ghastly wounds that don't make men cry out, or even lunatics laying for you thereafter—and there's a connection between the two, that's sure. But I mean big trouble. There's something in the air. I can't quite catch it, but it's been there for a long time. Weeks and months, sirdar."

"You've been reading the thesaurus again. You know more synonyms for 'master' than Roget. You mean this seriously, Brave? About trouble?" He had a respect for the Indian's intuition which was based half on his anthropological knowledge of the weird powers of certain older races, and half on pure human superstition; at times when Brave made his predictions, Alan felt as though a gypsy crone had passed by him and whispered some incantation in his ear.

"I mean it, Alan. And the damned instinct has never been wrong yet. It's beating in my guts right now like it did at Campana just before hell broke loose."

"Well, batten down the hatches, then," said Alan resignedly, while

the hair on the back of his neck pricked and tried to stand up. "It's got itself off to a fine start, your trouble. My tailor will never be able to mend this jacket."

"Why don't you 'cook us some oysters Rockefeller and lobster thermidor and all that Frenchified goop you brew up?" suggested Brave. "If we're in for afflictions, we may as well meet 'em with pleasantly full stomachs."

"Right. While I'm at it, you write a report of the incident—of both of them—and sign my name. Getty'll never know the difference. He thinks you haven't mastered Basic English yet."

"Ugh," said Brave. "Noble red man will inscribe li'l pictures on birchbark for medicine man, while medicine man raises cain in frozen food locker. Don't get that sauce too thin this time, patriarch. I can't bear watery sauce on my lobsters."

## CHAPTER II

NEXT morning, while Alan was still dressing and yawning, and Brave was clattering skillets in the kitchen, humming the *allegro con passionato* movement from "Hard Hearted Hannah the Vamp of Savannah," the door chimes bonged softly. Brave went to the spywindow, surveyed the caller, and shifted his grenade pistol to a handier position before opening the door. A stranger stood on the threshold.

"Ichabod Crane," said Brave to

himself, and aloud, "Yes?"

"Ah," said the stranger, "you would be the tough egg with the unpronounceable name. Greetings, chieftain."

"How," said Brave with a straight face. "You want-um audience with great sachem?"

"That I do, Lo."

"Oh, gad," groaned the Indian, "if I hear that weary old jest once more I'll burst into tears and die. Come in, comedian. Dr. Rackham's dressing."

"Thanks. Forgive me for the godawful gag, friend. I haven't eaten breakfast yet and an empty stomach plays the devil with my sense of humor." He rattled over to a chair and sat down. At least, thought Brave, closing the door, you expected him to rattle. He was the longest and thinnest bag of bones ever seen on Long Island. Fully six feet eight, he was lean from the top of his narrow skull, which was covered by an inch-long mat of straight stiff blond hair, to the soles of his number twelve feet. If he had any fat in him at all it must have been a very lonesome blob of fat indeed, well camouflaged and utterly alone in a wilderness of stringy muscle, meager sinew, and shaving-slender bones. His green eyes, perpetually half-lidded on either side of a nose like the prow of a Chinese junk, were humorous and sharp and as bright as polished emeralds.

Brave said to himself, Here is a

shrewd customer, who isn't one-tenth the fool he appears to be.

"You don't have an appointment with Dr. Rackham."

"No, I don't. A plump little meathead called Getty over at the central offices said he'd be here, and I popped over on the chance. I want to inveigle him onto a TV program of mine."

"Dr. Rackham is a busy man."

"So is President Blose of the U.S. of A., but *he* came on the program, Lo. Pardon me," said the man, "there I go again. It's second nature. I don't mean to offend, but I was a disk jockey once. Look, friend, my name is Jim McEldownie. I'm *Worlds of Portent* McEldownie."

"I'm *Lashings of Victuals* Kiwanawatiwa, and my eggs are scorching," said Brave, going out to the kitchen. "The books are counted, so are the pipes, and the first editions are booby-trapped. Don't get ideas."

"Injun, I could grow to love you," said McEldownie. "Listen, seriously, don't you ever watch TV?"

"I do not."

"That explains it. Existing in the dark like this, you wouldn't have heard of me. I run this klatch, see, called *Worlds of Portent*, onto which I entice various important and pseudo-important characters, and there I cajole and browbeat and query till they tell me all sorts of fascinating lies, and the public laps it up like a bunch of silly cats."

UNQUOTE, the Siamese, rose out of her hygienic playbox and gave him a frozen glare. He recoiled. "My God," he said, "I seem to be offending everyone this morning. Forgive me, puss."

Unquote snarled and collapsed in a boneless pile of beautiful fur. Alan stuck his head into the room and said, "Where do you classify me?"

"Huh? Oh, hallo, Doc. You're important. Anybody from Project Star is important. Whether the same can be said for those officials of our mighty government who have gasped and babbled and turned blue on *Portent*, I'm not one to declare. How about it, Doc? Will you appear?"

"Talking about what? Fuel? That's all I really know."

"If you can talk for thirteen minutes about it, without violating any regulations or giving away secrets, I want you. Fuel is hot stuff with the space-minded John Q."

"What do you think, Brave? Should we do it?"

Brave said, "Too much time and no fun, that's how it sounds to me."

"Oh, I don't know. I've never been on the air."

"Please," said McEldownie, shuddering like a leafless willow in a high wind. "The phrase is 'on the space.' Air belongs to that outmoded, decadent, but apparently deathless medium called radio. There, I've said it. Have you got any mouth-washing soap?"

"A positive Hilton Boil," said Brave in the kitchen. "A real yokked-up comic. Wait till I've fed him and we'll hurl him out."

"All right," said Alan, "I'll do it. I'm a ham at heart. When do you want me?"

"Tomorrow night at eight vacant?"

"As vacant as—" he was going to say "Dr. Getty's head," but caught himself in time. The TV man's flippancy was contagious. "Quite vacant. Give Brave the directions and we'll be there."

Brave said, "Breakfast is on. There are three plates and food for two. I hope you eat lightly, Mr. Portent."

"McEldownie, but call me Jim. I eat like a bird."

The bird, thought Alan half an hour later, must be a starving turkey buzzard; he sighed and stood up. "We're due at work, Jim. See you at eight tomorrow, then?"

"Seven-fifteen. I have to brief you. Cheers, gentlemen. Apologize to the cat for me. I insulted it a while back and it's been burning holes in my neck ever since." He took himself off, still with the illusion of rattling bonily. Alan and Brave washed up and strolled down to their laboratory.

Nothing happened that day or the next, save for a thorough search for the missing welder, which turned up no trace of him. At seven-fifteen the two friends walked into the TV

studio in Manhattan.

"Hi," said McEldownie, waving a long hand. "Sit down and let's gurgle about fuel." They did so. At one point the lean man said, "An idea. What if Brave were to stand behind you all through the program? It'd look impressive as hell. Sinister Indian guards scientist even on national hookup. 'No precaution too elaborate for our men,' says head of Project Star. How about it?"

Alan looked at Brave. He would not expose his friend to stupid ridicule. Brave winked. "Okay," said Alan. "But no gags."

"Abso-bloody-lutely. Play it for gravity. Show people that there is danger connected with the business. And I think there is," he added solemnly.

Alan stared. "Why do you say that?"

"I don't mean the TV, I mean your work out on Long Island. You can't tell me that nobody in the world wishes our country any ill, chum. We have enemies just as we always have had. Why else the ack-ack and force screens?"

Alan did not answer. He thought of Brave's prediction of trouble, and he was more impressed with this lanky comedian than he had been before that moment.

THIRTY seconds before the program time he sat down at the round-table opposite McEldownie, and Brave took up a forbidding posture behind his chair.

His host began to speak, and suddenly Alan realized why the tall blond irrepressible fellow had been trusted with a program of such gravity as *Worlds of Portent*. As the cameras rolled and the brilliant lights came on, the jester's motley dropped away from him and was replaced by a cloak of earnest sobriety. His fantastic appearance heightened the seriousness; it was as shocking and thought-producing as if a scarecrow had begun to talk Schopenhauer.

He knew precisely how much to say; when to sit back and let Alan do a monologue, and when to interrupt with a pertinent question. He was a genius at his work.

And then, perhaps four or five minutes after the telecast had begun, Alan became aware of two things, each quite extraordinary. First, Brave had disappeared. Alan glanced back over his shoulder and found the Indian had vanished. The lights were so bright that his vision did not extend to the walls of the studio, so he presumed that his friend was still there somewhere; but he had left the range of the cameras. And secondly, something was happening to Alan's mind.

He tried to analyze the trouble, but he could not do it. He could only touch a few salient points of it; the fact that although he was talking very learnedly, and with (so far as he could tell) lucidity and vigor, he was not controlling his tongue in the least. It was almost

like being drunk; there seemed to be a small entity perched on the root of his tongue who was pulling the strings of speech. But whereas the drunken entity was malicious and got him into all sorts of rows and riots, this particular sprite was doing what seemed a fine job for him. He knew quite well that he himself was not forming or directing the words he spoke. It was unpleasant, to say the least.

And there was something else. His mind, freed of necessity to concentrate on the program, was somewhere off in space, listening intently . . . listening to a voice from without and within, a voice that inhabited the cold wastes of time and infinity as well as the bone-bounded sphere of his brain.

*Listen to me, Alan Rackham*, said the voice. Wordlessly, yet with words, from the farthest stretches of the galaxies and still existing in the core of his own intellect, cold as hoarfrost, hot as berserker's rage, gentle and persuasive as a doting mother, the voice said to him, *Listen to me*.

**H**E would not listen. It was good and evil both together, and if he listened he would die. Yet it was said he would live. He would live forever; if time can be measured in terms of endlessness, he would not die. But he knew he would die. He struggled. The cameras picked up no hint of the travail. His face was intense and good-humored and

his words were intelligent; and all the while he fought with the voice and would not listen. He fought it for an hour, and for a month, and till the end of the world came and beyond, and it spoke to him, fire and ice in the same words, but without words, and then he began to listen to it.

At this point six minutes of the telecast had gone by.

*You are listening now, said the voice. You are listening, are you not?*

*I'm listening, God curse you.*

*I am taking you, Alan Rackham, as a bear takes a lamb, as a man takes a woman, as a hand takes a glove and the glove takes the hand.*

*I understand, curse you. Take me.*

*I am older than your whole race, and wiser than its cumulative wisdom, and I come from the stars.*

*Of course, you come from the stars. You are myself, and I understand you, friend.*

*Yes, I am yourself, wiser and stronger and older and beyond you in every way, and I am you. You are my servant, my slave, and myself.*

*Certainly, master. Why do you tell me things I have always known?*

*You are not obeying when you follow me, for you follow yourself, you who are now me.*

*You are God, are you not? said Alan in his mind. The Buddhists are right.*

*No. Not God. I am the atom*

*and I am the intergalactic void, you and me and everything right and wrong. Have you learned your lesson?*

*It is a lesson I knew in the womb.*

*Now you are mine, said the voice, approving without an iota's loss of the flame and frost of hatred and love blended flawlessly.*

*This is a pleasure beyond pleasure, sensation far above sensation. This is maelstrom descent and flying into the sun. This is the keenness of sexual transport to the nth power. I live for you.*

*Now you have it. Never forget it.*

*Never! swore Alan.*

*Now forget it.*

*I have forgotten it.*

*Now what do you have to do for me?*

*Whatever it is you wish.*

*Truly you are mine. Now you have forgotten me.*

*I have forgotten.*

*Who am I?*

*Who are you? asked Alan, perplexed.*

*Truly you have forgotten. What have you to say?*

*"So the problem of most importance confronting us then was, how can we carry enough of this fuel to get us to the moon and back? It took us seven years to solve that one, but as everyone knows, we did. Then Van Horne discovered the hitherto unknown properties of—" he was talking blithely, almost by rote, for this was history-book stuff;*

and there had never been any sprite guiding his tongue at all, nor any voiceless voice in the bitterness of the eternal chasm between the stars and there was no memory anywhere in his consciousness of such things, nor any lingering uncomfortable feeling that he had known a thing now forgotten . . .

### CHAPTER III

THEY were driving out Queens Boulevard toward the colony, and Alan said, "Why did you leave, Brave? Where'd you go?"

The great Indian spun the wheel for a curve. "Just back to the wall."

"Why?"

"Lights were too bright for my eyes."

Alan stared at him. "You could out-gaze the sun, you poker-faced liar, and you know it. Why did you leave?"

Brave glanced over at him. "Caliph, I hate to go on sounding like a spae-wife, or the Witch of Endor. But never in all my life have I had such a succession of ominous bodings. You'll think I'm turning raven in my old age—"

"No, damn-it, Brave, I know you can smell danger a mile or a month away. Go ahead."

"Quoth the raven, then. I didn't feel happy about standing there. Before we started, it seemed like a good quiet joke. But when we were there and the lights came on, and the cameras started, I suddenly had to step

back out of sight. I *had* to, Alan. A couple of my ghostly ancestors took me by the scruff and hauled me right away from there."

"That would have made a nice tableau on TV."

Brave chuckled deep in his chest. "Running Lizard and Pony Sees-the-Sky saving John Kiwanawatiwa from the white man's magic . . . I laugh, viceroy, but I swear it felt like that. The old desert-spawned blood—the blood that doesn't tame down—boiled up under those lights and cameras. It pulled the civilized flesh and bones away from them. It whispered that things were wrong, wrong for an Indian and wrong for his friend." He stepped on the gas viciously and the MG spurted forward onto the Union Turnpike like a turpentine hound. "Alan, I almost yanked you up and walked off with you under my arm. I didn't like you sitting there in the bath of electrical magic."

"Why didn't you do it?" asked Alan curiously.

"Oh, hell, boss man. It's one thing to have these primeval urges, and another to forget all your technical training and scientific knowledge so completely that you'll follow the impulse. Do you bust a window every time you'd like to?"

"Hmm." Alan was ill at ease. It seemed to him for a moment that there was something to Brave's instinct, and that he should have been snatched from those lights. Then he said, "I think it's merely that

someone had a shot at me the other day, and you've fretted over that till you're seeing assassins behind every chair."

"Maybe. Maybe." Brave rocketed the little car along the dark highway, across the miles to home, and all the while the tomtoms beat in his blood and he knew that he should be afraid, that he should be coldly and sanely afraid of some black hazard soon to come.

DON Mariner walked into their laboratory the following afternoon. He was one of the top engineers on Project Star, a youngish-middle-aged man running to flap and ever-thinning hair. Ordinarily good-humored, today he had a long face and a crease between his eyes. Without a word he spread a sheaf of blueprints and photostats out on a lab table. Alan and Brave bent over them. Don's stubby finger traced the outline of a flying disk, then stabbed at the fuel storage tanks and several other sections of the interior.

"Look at this, you two. I've had it under my nose for three months and it never struck me till today. Just look at it. See anything wrong?"

After a moment Alan said, "The fuel tanks are too big."

"My God! You ought to be the engineer instead of me. I ought to hire out for a potato peeler. Three months it took me to see it."

"What's the point of it?" asked

Brave. "If the disks are going to use hornethylene, they won't need a tenth—not a hundredth that much storage space, even if they want to circle the earth a dozen times without landing."

"Here's another thing," said Don Mariner. "This closet for space suits. Why? The stratosphere is the highest they're supposed to go, and there's no need for space suits there. You want a space suit to crawl around the outside of Alber-

tus, but not to wear in a disk. If there's trouble outside the shell you will simply land. Now look at these instruments." He showed them another chart. "Are these instruments for earth travel?"

"I don't know. Are they?"

"They are not. And also they're not the instruments Carey designed for the disks last year. They're a new set entirely, and some of 'em I don't understand myself, but I'll tell you this: they're not for earth travel. They're what you'd want in a space rocket." He looked up, his gray eyes bleak. "I faced Carey with 'em, and he swears they're his old design; and Carey doesn't lie in the ordinary course of events. But they're not, and I know it."

"What's the point?" asked Alan. The question was almost rhetorical; he knew the answer.

"The point is, these disks we're building are supposed to be purely and simply a faster means of traveling around Terra than any we have now. But the man in the street,

that faceless brainless little cipher, believes they're for conquering the stars. And by Judas, he's right! We're building interplanetary disks—and we're not supposed to know it!"

The three men stared at one another.

"Who's keeping it from us?"

"And why?"

"There are plenty of rocket projects—so what if someone wants to try a space disk instead? Why would he tell all his scientists and technicians a pack of lies? There's no need for secrecy, for God's sake!"

"But—my gosh," protested Alan, "no one man could keep a thing like this from all the rest of us. There must be ten or twenty who know. And details like these, the fuel tanks and instruments, they can't be hidden from anybody!"

"So where does it lead us?"

"Up a narrow, dank, and ill-smelling blind alley," said Brave.

"Not so bl—"

**T**HREE was a detonation outside the lab; a harsh, clangorous thunderclap of a sound, like the bursting of a bomb full of wash tubs and anchor chains. The three men were dashing for the door before the reverberations had died away.

A disk had crashed on the airfield. Brave and Alan and Don piled into a jeep and raced down toward it.

"I didn't know they had any ready for use," Alan shouted.

"Oh, yes. They haven't advertised it much, though. And this must

be the first test flight. I didn't know it was coming off today."

"You'd think we'd all have been invited to the takeoff. Big impressive show, faithful workers get afternoon off, and all that."

"Hell," said Don, "if they're keeping the purpose of the things from us, for no good reason that I can see, they might want to keep the test flight secret too."

"How can they keep it secret? It obviously had to take off in plain sight, and they couldn't shoo everyone indoors. No, I guess they just didn't give a damn about us. Underlings, unimportant servants, that's us," said Alan bitterly, with a flash preview of the terrible idea that would soon be obsessing him.

They pulled up beside the wreckage of the disk. There was no danger of explosion, due to the peculiar properties of hornethylene. The giant platter, with its raised top like a hot-dish cover and its bubble of clear crystal beneath, lay crumpled and bent, one-third of its whole edge accorded in upon itself. Even as they came up the crystal bubble inched open; not smoothly, as it should have done, but like a damp-swollen door creaks away from its frame under heavy pressure. The pilot thrust his legs out and dropped to the ground. Alan and a dozen others ran to him.

"Hi," said he. "Guess I pulped this job up right."

"Good Lord, man, are you okay?"

"Not a nick. I just had time to

see the ground coming up at me and bingo, I was sitting there with my eyes popping. Anybody got a drink?" He was cut to the pattern of all airmen since the days of monoplanes: tall, narrow of hip and wide of shoulder, lean always-tanned face, a wry grin on the mouth and horizon-hunger in the eyes.

Somebody gave him a flask. "Were you alone?" asked Alan.

"Sure. They can't risk two guys in these things yet. We don't know what they'll do. This one'll take some going over with a microscope and tweezers; it's full of bugs. Someone jockey me to the main offices?"

The crowd dispersed slowly; but Brave, putting an urgent hand on Alan's arm—it enfolded his biceps and the fingertips met the thumb, for Brave's hands were as outsize as the rest of him—held him there. "Wait a minute, risaldar. I want to check something."

"Another instinct, Brave?"

"Plain horse sense. And I want to check it before the big boys clamp a top secret sign on this wreck."

He reached up and gripped the edge of the crystal bubble. It resisted him. He set his muscles and tugged with all his incredible strength. The crushed metal hinges complained and shrieked and parted, and the great bulbous sheet of plastic-quartz fell to the ground, narrowly missing him as he dodged back.

"I'll boost you up, and you can give me a hand."

INSIDE the disk, they crouched and went through the tunnel into the control room. This comprised the entire central portion of the disk; suspended within the shell, like a small kernel in a large nut, it was held comparatively steady as the outer husk rocked and rolled and flipped in its characteristic skipped-rock flight. Alan did not understand the principle of this near-motionless suspension of the control room within an erratically weaving hull, although Don Mariner had tried to explain it to him in patient two-syllable words. It involved a knowledge of the newest developments in gyroscopics, which the young fuel expert did not comprehend. Brave had a fairly good idea of the basic laws involved, but wisely had never tried to beat it into his friend's head. Alan on fuel, on chemistry, on philosophy, was superb; Alan on dynamics or any other branch of mechanics was deplorable.

They looked around the room. Nearly all the equipment was still in its place, for the clamps that held it during the astonishing speeds the disk could maintain in flight had held it still in the shattering instant of the crash. But the entire control board, the panels of instruments and the wide mirrors that gave the pilot a view of the earth and air from every angle, had all been shoved back and broken when the saucer had struck its nose edge into the ground.

Brave walked over to the pilot's seat and stood silently surveying the mess. At last he said, "Alan."

"Yes?"

"Look here."

Alan looked, and started as though he had been stabbed with a hypodermic needle. "God . . ." he said.

The control board had buckled back against the pilot's chair; something beyond it, some ponderously heavy piece of machinery in the space between central room and shell, had knifed through wall and board as sharp and deadly as the blade of a guillotine. The metal had sliced the center of the pilot's seat to within six inches of the back.

No man could have sat there at the moment of the crash, as the pilot averred he had done.

He would never have lived. He would have been cut in two . . .

#### CHAPTER IV

THAT night Alan and Brave rode across Project Star to the women's building, where Alan's fiancee, Win Gilmore had a small apartment. Win — short for Winifred, and God help the man who called her *that*—opened the door before the sound of the diacoustic bell had died away.

The first thing that struck you about Win was color: she looked as though she had been put together by a Bergdorf Goodman display artist with a genius for analogous

chromas. Her hair was washed in a pale aquamarine and dusted over with luminous flecks of mauve; it was drawn back to the crown and clasped there by an abstract spiral of silver, from which it fell in darkening waves down her naked back. Her nylon jersey lounging outfit, cut with almost severe simplicity, was graduated from pink to a deep violet hue. Her finger and toe nails were lacquered with phosphorescent sapphire, and the lashes of her blue eyes were dyed with mascara of the same glowing shade.

Her skin was a soft golden color, thanks to half an hour a day under the sun lamps of the colony's gymnasium.

"How, oh squaw of rainbow brilliance," said Brave, holding up a hand in grave salute. "I leave this warrior in your keeping, whilst I shuffle down to the recroom and squander a few bucks on the pinball machines."

"How, oh mountain that walks. Will you have a slug of Scotch first?"

"The noble red man, pampering his internal workin's, drinks only rum this week. No thanks, Win. The gambling fever's got me. See you."

Alan closed the door behind him and took Win into his arms. He kissed her, gently at first, then hard; their lips parted, warm on each other as their bodies warmed, his hands strong and taut on her back; he smoothed his fingers down the hol-

low of her spine, ran them up into her soft hair. She said against his mouth, "You demolish that toilsomely-wrought thatch, boy, and I'll demolish you." He laughed and pushed her away and lit a cigarette, stray flecks of mauve from her hair glittering on his fingers.

She went to the low cocktail table and picked up an already filled glass. He took it from her. "Here's atomic dust in yer eye, Winniefred," he toasted, and drank long and thirstily.

"Whoa, Nellie. Haven't you drunk anything today?"

"Only the dregs of woe," he said lightly, and then his lean face changed and his eyes looked into a remote place which they did not like. At once she touched his arm.

"Sit down, Alan." He did so automatically, and she perched tailor-fashion on the edge of the couch beside him. "What's the matter?"

"I wish I knew."

"Just the blues? You been skipping meals? That always makes you ethereal and moody. I'd as soon have Unquote with a tooth-ache around the place as you after you've missed your lunch."

"No, not the blues. Big trouble, sweetheart, that's been exploding right and left with no rhyme to it. I've thought so much about it in the last few hours that I doubt if I can even talk about it now."

THEN, of course, he told her everything: beginning with the

welder's accident and eerie lack of pain, then the shot from the bushes, Brave's indefinite fears - climaxing at the telecast, Don Mariner's discovery of the undreamt-of potentials of the disks, the crack-up ending the almost-furtive test flight, and the pilot who lived when he should have been butchered, Alan brought it all out; and as he listened to his own words a dreadful idea was born and grew and expanded throughout his intellect until suddenly he knew that here was his answer, that no other could be rationally accepted. He sat silently for minutes, while Win watched him, and gradually the color swept out of his face and he began to shiver.

She put the glass into his hand. He drained off the last of the drink, and she clicked open a deep drawer of the cocktail table and gave him another, freshly mixed at a touch of her finger on the emerald stud of the drawer.

"What is it, Alan? You've seen something in it, some connection between these events. What is it?"

He took a shuddering breath through open lips and said, "Yes, I know. I know what we have to fight."

"Fight? You mean there are enemies? You can deduce that from —"

"My God, yes, there are enemies." He turned, to fix her with a glare like a lunatic's. "Listen, Win. We all have the desire to go out to the other planets, and to the

stars beyond our system. We've built a score of rocket projects all over the continent because of that desire. It's no secret, everyone has it. Right?"

"Sure, darling. Even I want to see—well, Mars, anyway."

"But here are these disks, too good, too damned good by far, possibly capable of doing just that; and the government and most of us have thought they were only for earth travel. Why? Who would want to build ships for interplanetary, or even for all I know interstellar-space flight, and keep it hidden from the rest of mankind?"

"Russia?" she suggested humbly.

"Oh, nuts. You might as well say Switzerland. No, it's here at home, on Project Star, and it's a handful or more than a handful of our own top men.

"Now the other angle: there are men here who apparently can't be hurt by ordinary means, who don't feel pain, who can resist the force of such a weapon as a thousand-pound cutlass-edged juggernaut, and who only stare quietly when their hands are melted off like butter in a flame."

"Yes?"

"Put the two together, Win. Remember that after I'd seen one evidence of this lack of pain, I was ambushed. Someone thought I ought to die before I spread the word around. Who?"

"Well, who?"

He drank again and lit a cigarette.

The lighter shook in his hand. "There's only one answer I can see," he said. "Correct me if I'm crazy, baby. There are mutants among us. We've been anticipating them in fiction for decades. Now they're here, and they want to reach the stars before we do, they want to pass unnoticed until they're ready to—to take over, or whatever their purpose is."

"Mutants, Alan?"

"The natural progression from Homo Sapiens. Homo superior. The supermen."

SHE slid a pointer across its bar two notches and pressed the emerald button and the table delivered a dry Martini, which she sipped as she regarded him steadily. At last she said, "Is that the sole possibility, sweetheart? Isn't it a pretty wild explanation to accept on the evidence of a couple of queer accidents?"

"I don't think so," he said gruffly. "No, blast it, I don't think it's too wild. It's perfectly possible, and it fits the facts."

"Your Homo superior must be about as fallible as poor old sapiens, then because he's let his secrets out with a vengeance. I'd think that anyone smarter than we are would at least simulate pain after his hand was burnt off."

"That was a slip-up, yes. But he didn't know anyone was watching."

"Homo superior must have a low opinion of our intelligence, or he wouldn't have let those blueprints get into our hands."

"The progression of the disks' manufacture has come to the point where he couldn't help it, I suppose. And maybe by now it doesn't matter. Don's had those fuel tank charts for three months, because it was necessary that he work on aspects of construction so close to the tanks that it was impossible to falsify them. But he only saw the instrument panel plans this morning. As I said, maybe it doesn't matter now. If the disks are near enough ready to be taking test flights, maybe the mutants are going to step out in the open."

"Then why would they shoot at you?"

"Hell, I don't know. Perhaps they'll publish the purpose of the disks without mentioning their own roles, as secret designers and builders and as creatures that can't be hurt. They could say 'security reasons' and get away with a lot."

"It's an explanation, all right," said Win. "I don't swallow it, boy, but it does fit the facts. So do all sorts of other weird theories."

"Such as?"

"Ah, you don't want my ideas. They're as mad as your own." She leaned over the arm of the couch and touched several glowing spots on its outer surface; at once the illumination of the room cooled and faded. The forest green walls,

complimentary to her own coloring and to the clothing she wore, appeared to recede and become the dark depths of a woodland on a moonless night; the furniture seemed to change into moss-grown stumps and great misshapen rocks. Overhead, the ceiling turned dusky blue under the play of hidden tint-beams, and miniature galaxies twinkled and gleamed across its surface, their varying incandescence giving the illusion of tridimensional infinity.

Alan set down his glass and looked over at her. She was a shape of nocturnal secrecy, sinuous darkness against which her nails and eyelashes burned with phosphorescent sapphire. Her use of the luminous lacquer was an artful bit of technique. It made her into a fantastic mystery which cried out to be solved. Although Alan had seen the trick before, he could never resist it. It was unbelievable that the sober girl in a shapeless smock who sweated in the metallurgy lab was also this Cleopatra, this shadowy temptress; Troy's exquisite Helen, yearning for love, her strong enchantments designed to make her both conqueror and conquest.

**F**ORGETTING the half-smoked cigarette between his fingers, forgetting the supermen and everything else but his physical craving, he threw himself down on the wide couch beside her. His hands touched the live softness of the halter

and slid to her back. The sweet strong muscles glided under his fingers as she lifted her arms to take his face between her hands. Then his hands went down from flesh to fabric and he felt her long body pressing tight against him, close as his own skin.

He opened his eyes and saw the glowing purple of her lashes and in the thick gloom the dimmed luster of her teeth between the parted lips. He kissed her and closed his eyes again. He touched her throat, where the blood throbbed close to the surface in a fast steady rhythm; he found other pulses and held his fingertips on them until his own caught their beat and merged with it and the separate throbings were one.

It was dark, then very dark, the dark of a sunless sea lapping all about them, and slowly it grew lighter and he was sitting up to run his fingers through his unmanageable hair and remember that some time ago he had been holding a cigarette.

"Hey," he said, "what happened to my Rocketeer?"

Win stretched out a lazy arm and brought the lights up once more. "Sure you didn't put it out?"

"I swear I didn't. My God, here it is," he said, picking it off the couch where it had been smashed and its tobacco scattered. "What did I stub that out on?"

"Probably the couch. It doesn't matter, it's resistant."

He looked carefully but could find no place where a cigarette's fire might have been crushed. He shrugged. "So long as I didn't burn you, baby."

"You didn't." She had the automatic table mix them two cocktails. "There's Brave back from the recroom," she said.

"Ears like a fennec," he said admiringly. "I didn't hear anything."

"Watch it, brother. I know what a fennec's ears look like." She went to open the door for the big Indian. "How'd you do, Brave?"

"Gambled away a dollar and seventy-five cents in a reckless passion. Are you ready to go home, sheikh?"

"Yes, I am. I have a theory I want to talk about."

"You argue him out of it, Brave," said Win. "He's been working too hard. He thinks supermen are after him."

Brave looked at Alan and his fine face grew hard and set. "Supermen . . ." he said. "Mutants. Alan, is that it?"

"I think that's it."

"It fits the picture, all right."

"It explains every instance we've observed."

"I believe you're on the right track," nodded Brave. "When did you find it?"

"While I was telling Win about it. Let's go home and thrash it out, son. She's a disturbing influence."

Brave eyed Win up and down

with a leer that on anyone else would have been particularly lewd and lascivious. From the faithful Brave it was merely what he meant it to be—a piece of mild buffoonery. "You underestimate the case, my liege. Your woman has a plump and supple look; she wriggles too much, such minxes are dangerous. Let's drag tail."

"Okay, boys. Go knock your steel-plated skulls together. But remember that I think you're barking up an impossible tree at an invisible possum what ain't thar." She swung the door open for them and stood aside, one arm upraised with the hand on the jamb.

Alan kissed her a light farewell, and Brave patted her on the head and said, "Ketch-um sleep, squaw, you look bushed." Then, as Alan turned away, his glance was caught by a mark on Win's arm. It was a round blemish, an angry-looking red welt to the edges of which still clung infinitesimal flakes of gray ash smudged into the skin. He turned away and walked down the corridor with Brave at his side, and he thought ferociously of every possibility he could imagine, but his mind always came back to the same answer.

It was a burn, just such a small wound as would result, say, from a cigarette being pressed out against the arm by an oblivious lover.

And it should have been shockingly painful.

"But Win had not felt it at all . . .

## CHAPTER V

ALAN awoke after an hour of nightmare-ridden sleep. He opened his eyes and got quietly out of bed and put on his tweed suit and a pair of loafers, and walked out of the house without disturbing the slumber of Brave.

He went down to the main road and walked along it in the moonlight toward a distant group of buildings. Presently a soldier stepped into his path.

"Halt and identify yourself."

"I am Dr. Alan Rackham of Fuel Research. My security number is A10C14B44."

The soldier looked at him a moment and then his eyes glittered. "Pass, friend," he said, and standing aside he watched Alan go on toward the buildings. There was a cynical smile on the soldier's mouth.

Alan came to a squat flat-roofed structure like a concrete shed. He knocked on the door. It opened and he went in. One weak bulb burned in a lamp. There was a tall man standing there in the shadows. He shook hands with Alan.

"Welcome, companion. Just sit down here."

Alan seated himself on a stool. The other passed along two walls and in succession a number of vivid lights flared out, bathing Alan in their burning radiance. He did not blink, but looked steadily and fixedly ahead.

"Greetings, said the voice,

*Greetings, master.*

*Are you happy to return to me?  
I have never been away from you.*

*That is true. Now I have things  
to tell you. You will not remember  
them consciously tomorrow, but you  
will obey the commands and refuse  
to do those things which I tell you  
are wrong. Understood?*

*Understood.*

*Now first, slave, said the voice  
coldly, anger piled on icy anger in  
the dripping wordless thoughts: you  
have decided that there are aliens  
among you. A race of supermen,  
mutated from your own weak breed.*

*Yes.*

*That is untrue. Forget it.*

*It is forgotten.*

*Such an idea is foolishness.*

*It is stupid, said Alan, believing.*

*There are no aliens. There are  
neither supermen nor mutants. There  
is no thinking race on earth but the  
genus Homo. The accidents are unre-  
lated; the welder a victim of shock,  
the pilot merely lucky.*

*I see.*

*The disks are under the supervi-  
sion of the government, who wished  
to keep their purpose secret until  
now.*

*Security reasons, said Alan in  
blind agreement.*

*There is only you and there is  
only me, I who am you, you who are  
me. And this is our private knowl-  
edge and not to be spoken of.*

*I would die rather than tell of it.*

*Now you are mine again.*

*Never anything else, master.*

*Forget me.*

*Forgotten.*

*Go home.*

*Of course.*

Alan rose and passed out of the range of the lights, and the tall man nodded with approval and began to switch off his terrible lamps.

ALAN woke in the grayness of dawn, cramped and half-chilled from sleeping in a chair. He stretched and groaned, and got up to brew some coffee. BRAVE woke at the clinking of china and came padding out to the kitchen.

"Up so early, commodore? You look as if you hadn't slept."

"I slept, all right, but it didn't do much good. My head's splitting."

BRAVE took over the coffee pot. "Any more ideas on the mutant theory?"

"Oh, hell. I guess I was wrong."

BRAVE turned and looked at him. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, look. The welder might have been suffering from shock. The pilot was—just lucky. And the business of the disks can be explained by obtuse government security regulations. And where does that leave our precious superman notion? Out in the cold and wet."

BRAVE shook his great head. "Huh-uh, son. More to it than that. Too many coincidences spoil the broth; too many queer things happening isn't right. I think you were on the trail of truth last night."

"I was talking through my ear," said Alan irritably.

Brave stared at him. A furrow appeared above the great hawk nose. He bent and pushed Alan's head back and looked into his friend's eyes. Alan tried to jerk his head away and Brave held it steady in the grip of one tough fist. He lifted Alan's lids one after the other and growled deep in his chest.

"What the devil, Brave!"

The Indian stood erect. "By the Great Spirit," he said. "Hypnotized!"

"What in hell's name are you talking about?"

"You've been hypnotized. Your pupils are swollen as big as grapes."

"You're crazy."

Brave regarded him equably. "Sure, tetrarch. Sure I'm crazy. Did you go out last night?"

"You were with me. What's wrong with you? We went to Win's."

"I mean later, when I was asleep."

"Certainly not. I did get up and go into the living room, though, and I fell asleep in a chair."

"Ah," said Brave. He considered a moment. "Watch the java, will you?"

Alan nodded. The Indian went out of the kitchen. Alan heard him moving things about in their little laboratory beside the plastic-glassed lounging quarters. In five minutes he returned.

"Alan, you trust me, don't you?"

"My God, do you have to be re-

assured on that? Ever since we marched through Argentina together. Since Campana and Buenos Aires and that hell of Pergamino. I'd trust you if you told me to jump into Lower Bay."

"Okay. Now do me a favor." He gulped down a cup of scalding coffee. "Drink up and come with me."

ALAN drank obediently, and stood and followed Brave into the lab. In a cleared space stood a pair of machines, looking somewhat like giant cameras, the lens of one covered by a multicolored disk, that of the other unshaded; there were plastic charts bolted to the sides, and dials and several types of indicator, and among all these the distinctive green and gold seal of the Institute of Psychotherapeutic and Hypnotherapeutic Research.

Alan balked. "Hold on, Brave! You aren't going—"

"You said you trust me. Do it now if never again. Sit down."

"No!" he shouted. He was not quite sure of his reasons, but he knew he must not be hypnotized.

Brave moved to shut him off from the door. "You'll sit there if I have to knock you out, boss."

Alan saw he was not joking. He said, "Where did you get the machines, Brave?"

"Had 'em around for years. I've always been intrigued by hypnosis, you know that. In fact you knew

I had the machines. Will you sit down?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Damn it, you're sparring for time. If you think—"

Alan swung on him without warning, a lashing buffet that could have broken a lesser man's neck; Brave took it square on the side of his jaw and staggered back, shaking his head. Then he caught Alan's coat as the smaller man leaped for the door. He swept him around by the coat like a yo-yo on a string, and judging his blow as carefully and dispassionately as an old champion measures an upstart contender, he rammed his big fist into Alan's belly just below the ribs. It jolted Alan back and doubled him over and made him blind with agony. He could not breathe. There was no air left in his lungs and he could not suck any into them. He was going to die. He wanted to die. He was dying.

Brave dropped him, unresisting, into the chair and tied him down with a few turns of a light rope. "Son," he said, "I know that wasn't you that socked me, it was whatever creeping louse got to you last night. I'll apologize later for smacking you . . . if you want me to." He went to his machines and began to turn dials and adjust gauges, and move pointers on the graduated scales. He tipped Alan's head up and clamped it firmly in the vise-like apparatus which rose from the chair's back. Alan was groggy, his

breath now hissing in and out between clenched teeth. Brave went on talking.

"I could have knocked you out, and it wouldn't have hurt nearly as much; but I wanted you awake. That pain may help, too. Rob Pope was saying something the other day about intense pain being an aid in nullifying the effects of hypnosis, when allied, that is, with counter-hypnosis. We'll see. Take it easy, pup."

Your technical training could be a deterrent factor, thought Brave; you may be able to oppose the mechanical-visual patterns successfully. I hope not. It doesn't seem to me that there's a lot of time left to us, and I want you back on my side.

HE focused the lens of one machine on Alan's half-open eyes and pressed a button. Light began to flicker across the agonized face, its color changing from second to second. Brave cut in the other beam and white light that shifted its form even as the first shifted color lanced through the blue and red and yellow. Alan shut his eyes, but immediately opened them again.

"You can't resist it," said Brave quietly. "You don't want to resist it. You like the pretty lights." The voice was an important stimulus too. "Your mind is conditioned to taking orders, isn't it, son? Somebody's been giving you evil commands. You don't like that. You'd rather listen to me." The weird pat-

terns of the light beams held Alan's dull gaze. He was already adrift in a flashing vacuum. Brave's voice came to him slurred and without sense. Gradually he began to hear the words.

"Somebody hypnotized you last night, didn't they, son?"

"Yes. I think they did."

"Who did it?"

"I don't know. A tall man."

"Do you know his name?"

"I couldn't see his face very well."

"What did he tell you?"

There was a long silence. Then Alan, his face contorted, said, "He didn't tell me anything. He only put on the lights. They were vivid as sin. Then there was a voice."

"What did the voice say? You can tell Brave, son. Good old Brave. You trust Brave."

He thought. "I can't tell you," he said. "Not even you. It was a voice. It was the voice. My voice. I love it."

"Isn't there anything you can repeat?"

"Yes. It said I had to forget the superman theory. It explained the accidents; and the disks. It's all natural. It isn't mutants."

Brave started to sweat. He pried at Alan's mind, learning almost everything about the night before. But he did not find out that Alan had first heard the voice at the telecast, nor did he learn that the voice and Alan were one, master and slave, but one. The earlier hypnosis had been too clever. It had struck at the

roots of Alan's soul, becoming religion and truth to him, and he would not deny it or betray it.

At last realizing that he had heard all he was going to hear, the Indian gave Alan certain counter-commands. He repeated them until Alan squirmed and whimpered under the repetition. Finally Brave was satisfied. By using the powerful mechanical-visual stimuli, it was usually easy enough to plant ideas in a subject, and only infinitely stronger agents could destroy such ideas. Brave hoped that the enemy did not have stronger agents; but he knew that in the last analysis it was a timid and unsure hope indeed.

"About all I can do now," he growled low, "is stick with you as if I was a cocklebur in your hair. Till they kill me, or we beat 'em."

HE turned off his machines and brought Alan to full consciousness. He untied him and led him into the lounging quarters, pushing him down onto a yielding sofa. "Take it easy for a while. That was quite an ordeal. I guess you have a belly-ache." He poured two long Scotches. "Now tell me what you remember."

Alan thought. "Everything," he said with surprise, "At least I suppose it's everything." He repeated the substance of what they had both said in the lab. "Right?"

"That's it. I told you to remember it all. I wanted to level with you, chief. We've got a fight on

our hands and I can't have you going around in a daze. You've got to realize what happened to you last night, so you can buck another attempt like it. By the way, you couldn't tell me why you went down to that building."

"I don't know. I haven't any memory of going, or of what happened there; I simply recall telling you about it. I have a memory of a memory, I suppose you could say."

"Strong medicine those dog soldiers are using, by God," said Brave. "The more I learn about them, the surer I am that they're superior mutants."

"I think so too," said Alan. Brave grinned. His therapy had overcome the former hypnotist's commands. Alan went on. "The big question was, why have they suddenly appeared among us, why now? I think we have that answered. It isn't sudden; it may have been happening for generations. Slip-ups may have occurred as far back as history goes. One mistake might go unremarked; two might make a man wonder: then he'd investigate; and be either eliminated (they shot at me, you remember!) or hypnotized and taken under the control of the mutants."

"Bright lad! Your own experience bears that out."

"So the newest big question would be: how do we fight them? Perhaps we're the first to recognize them and retain our own wills. We can't let that circumstance go to waste,

Brave. We've got to strike at them for our race's sake." He scowled. "But that leads to this: *do we strike at them?*"

"What do you mean, Alan?"

"I mean . . . well, Brave, would we be in the right to take law into our own hands and start a murder campaign, say, against them? Suppose we were fighting good, instead of evil?"

Brave looked blank.

"How do we know they're wrong?" Alan continued. "How do we know they're against us? Perhaps they are the true race of the future, and every man of intelligence should be on their side. No, this isn't an hypnotically planted theory: it's something I brooded on last night before I went to sleep. Where do our loyalties stand? If Homo superior is intelligent and self-centered, callous toward us, then obviously we fight him fang and claw. But if he is intelligent and benevolent, as you'd expect from a higher type of being, then we should ally ourselves with him."

"He shot at you. Is that benevolence?"

"I know. We might be wrong. It may have been a simple maniac who did it. Again, I think the coincidence would be too great; well, perhaps Homo superior had a good reason for it. We can't judge too deeply on insufficient evidence."

Brave said, "I see what you mean, Alan, and in abstract

theory I agree with it. If the mutants are a good breed, a real improvement on our own kind, then we owe them the allegiance of intelligent underlings. But concrete evidence says they're not good. They shoot at you; they employ the most malefic and vicious kind of hypnotism on you, where a simple conditioning to the fact of their goodness would have brought you around to their side just as easily—and with twice the value. They aren't good. They are villainous." He grimaced. "I can see you hate the idea. Why? What's on your mind that I don't know about?"

Alan turned a haunted face to him. "Brave," he said, "Brave, Win's one of them."

The Indian said, "No. You're wrong. Not Win."

"That's what I repeated a couple of hundred times last night. Not Win, not Win. But I mashed out a cigarette on her arm—accidentally, of course—and she didn't feel it. It left a hell of a burn. But she never felt it. She can't feel pain. *She's mutant.*"

Brave laid his hands on his thighs and shook his head and could say nothing. Alan went on. "Has she been playing with me, then? Or can they get physical pleasure from us? Or was it her job to watch me for signs of awareness?"

"Not that. You've been engaged too long for that."

"Well, what is the reason? Is it possible that she could actually be

in love with me? Me, a member of a lower species! I've asked myself, could I fall in love with an orangutan? A fairly bright, good-looking orangutan? The answer always comes out *no.*"

"Hardly a fair comparison."

Alan glanced over at the mirror that formed the west wall of the otherwise plastiglassed-in room. He saw himself haggard, gray in the face, with bloodshot pouched eyes, and clad in tweeds that had obviously been slept in. "Hardly fair to the ape," he said, grinning a little.

"I can't believe Win is one of them," said Brave stubbornly.

"And I can't find any other explanation. If I make sure she is, and if we find they're evil, as we think, then I know what's the first thing I'll do." He looked his friend in the eyes. "I'll kill her, Brave. I'll cut her damned lying throat!"

THEN he stood up. "Enough of that. There are bigger things at stake than Win right now. I think we may take it as a truism that you and I can't hinder the superman's plans worth a whoop. Nor could we get to more than one or two people in authority before we were found out and stopped. Lord, the very ones we'd naturally go to are probably mutants themselves! So there's just one thing to be done. Enlist the fellows we know are all right. There's Don Mariner, for a start. He's plump and balding and

looks ineffective but he's as smart a lad as we have on the Project. Then there's Rob Pope; he was in the hospital last month when he cut himself badly on a hot sheet of plastiquartz. He's in the plastic chemistry section, but he knows a lot about hypnotism and such-like, so he'd be an asset."

"Can we trust him just because he cut himself? He might have faked the pain."

"Brave, we've got to trust somebody! All we can do is grasp at little indications of true humanity. Let's see. Who else is there?"

"Bill Thihling, the rocketjet man. He was at Oxford with me. Rhodes scholar, prince of a guy, and abnormally sensitive—I've seen him throw up when a dog was run over. He's no callous mutant."

"Good deal. That's five of us. Any more?"

They thought hard. Mentioning names, discarding them as unsure risks, they ran through all their acquaintances. No more potential allies could they find till Alan said, "Jim McEldownie!"

"What do we know about Jim?"

"That he's uglier than the Duchess in *Alice*. Look at the mutants we've recognized: the welder, a well-set-up Tarzan type; the pilot, a clean-cut handsome dog; and Win, a ravishing belle. Does Jim fit in with them? My sainted grandmother, no! And if we convince him of our belief, he might put us on TV to broadcast it to the country. *Worlds*

*of Portent* has a huge following, and people believe what they see and hear on it. Then afterward, if *they* get us, we won't have wasted what may be the first and last opportunity men have had to publicize the presence of the enemy among us."

Brave went to the visiphone. There was an atmosphere of tense disquiet in the room now, as though things were about to burst out in violence and passion at any second. The Indian talked with Don Mariner and Pope and Thihling, who all agreed to come over within the hour; then he called McEldownie. Shortly the lanky announcer was looking quizzically at him from the screen. "How, Lo." He shuddered. "How low can you reach for a gag? What's up?"

"Mac, can you get here right away?"

"Unholy cats—apologies to Unquote—why the rush?"

"Just say we need a good man in a hurry."

The other cocked an eyebrow. "I detect the aroma of butter, salve, and the old oil. Okay, I'll take an air taxi. Heat up any spare steak you have lying around. I haven't eaten breakfast."

"Naturally," said Brave, and turned off the visiphone. "There," he said to Alan, "now all we have to do is convince them."

IT took two hours to convert the four men to their views. Don Mariner, because of his own find-

ings, was with them from the first exposition; Pope was intrigued but skeptical; Thihling was frankly incredulous; and McEldownie was scornful and astonished by turns.

At last the fierce earnestness of Brave and Alan had its effect, and all of them were on their feet, pacing up and down, shouting at one another, smacking their fists into their palms and proposing unworkable plans at random.

Alan argued with Jim about the telecast. Finally the lean man said, "All right. I'm wacked. We're all wacked. They'll take away my job, my license, and my reputation. They'll toss us all in the hatch. Maybe we'll be lucky and get a room together. We can sit in a ring and make faces at each other for the next fifty years." He shrugged. "Nevertheless, we'll do it. We'll do it tonight. If things are coming to a head, we've got to step high and swift. I'd scheduled the Secretary of State tonight, but he'll have to wait. I'll go down and make arrangements. Won't say anything to the sponsors, naturally, or the staff. They trust me . . . they've done it for the last time, I imagine. Well, I've had five good years on TV. Let's finish it in a real crackerjack blaze of the well-known glory, gents. Here we go round the loony bin."

"You, boy," said Alan fervently, "are okay."

"I'm a living doll," said McEldownie moodily, and left.

Bill Thihling, the rocketjet man, a compact sturdy pocketsized fellow about Brave's age—thirty-six or seven—said, "Now let's have some action. Let's *do* something."

"First thing we do is swallow some antigues," said Brave, going into the kitchen for the bottle. Antigues were anti-fatigue tablets, on which a man could keep fresh and intelligent for seventy-two hours without sleep. "I have an idea that sleep will be a myth and a vagrant memory for us before too long."

"And then," said Don Mariner, "we catch one of the supermen and beat some truth out of him."

Alan laughed hollowly, reminding himself of a character out of *MacBeth*. "Beat it out of him? Torture a being that doesn't feel pain?"

"Kill him, then," urged Rob Pope. "It's simple bloodthirst, but we've got to make a beginning. Perhaps it'll make his cousins fret a little. Bring 'em into the open."

"We don't even know they can be killed. A thousand-pound 'sword' couldn't faze the pilot of that disk. What could we do?"

"We can try! It's no good our arguing back and forth; we haven't any real data. The only thing to do is kidnap one of *them*, see what makes him tick, and then do our planning."

"I'm for that," said Don. "Which one shall we take?"

"The welder's vanished, and we can't very well torture, or try to torture, Win Gilmore. Too rough

on Alan. Let's have in the pilot of the wrecked disk."

"He wouldn't come here if we called him: too suspicious a request," said Alan. "Kidnapping's the thing."

"Pope and I can handle that," said Thihling. "Anyone know his name?"

"Erin Grady," said Don Mariner. "Judas, isn't that a handle!"

Rob Pope, a big rangy man built in the style of a woodsrunner out of early America, said, "Ho for Erin Grady, then. And if he tries any of his damn superman's hypnosis, I'll fling it in his own teeth. I know a trick or two in that line myself."

The two of them left the house. Brave began to mix three stiff highballs, and Don Mariner took out a harmonica and played Bach, with only a few sour notes per bar. Alan picked up the cat Unquote and fondled her. But his thoughts were grim. All he could see was a beautiful girl who he longed to hold in his arms. A beautiful girl with a cigarette burn on her arm. A girl who felt no pain. Win . . .

## CHAPTER VI

THEY brought in Erin Grady, dressed in brown civilian clothes and wearing an expression of curiosity on his lean well-proportioned face and in eyes that were accustomed to peering into measureless deeps of the sky. "How'd you get him?" asked Brave.

"Lied like a trooper," said Pope, and the pilot turned half-angry, half-amused blue eyes on him.

Brave gestured to a straight-backed chair. "Please sit there, Mr. Grady." The pilot did so without question. "Forgive this wire," Brave went on, looping the heavy coils around the man's chest and arms, "but we don't think rope would hold you."

Then the pilot spoke. "Kept telling myself for years that scientists are all cracked," he said philosophically. "Guess this proves it."

"Bill," said the Indian to Thihling, "go out and patrol the house. Let us know if anybody approaches —anybody at all."

The rocketjet man left them. Brave put Grady's hands flat on the arms of the chair and lashed them down at wrist and knuckles. Then he stood back, Alan and Don and Rob a little behind him, and he said gravely, "Erin Grady, you smashed up a disk yesterday. But you weren't hurt."

"I was lucky."

"You sat in the regular pilot's chair as it hit?"

"Sure, I—" then his eyes narrowed and he shut his mouth.

"Too late," said Brave grimly. "You gave yourself away. You aren't so clever as you're supposed to be."

"Whaddaya mean?"

"For a superman, you're too slow on the trigger. We got into that disk before they clamped a security

ring around it. We saw what happened to the chair. No human could have missed being sliced down the brisket by that juggernaut that came through the control board."

"You clever, clever little bastards," said Grady venomously. "You'll be dealt with." For the first time he seemed angered at the wire that held him. He threw his weight against it, but it held firm. He glared at each of them, and Rob Pope said, "He's trying hypnotism; watch yourselves."

Mariner chuckled. "He can't affect me, I'm too fat. The thought waves get lost."

Brave did not even feel the tentative vibrations of the pilot's mind, but he glanced at Alan and saw that his friend was sweating. "You okay, guru?" he asked anxiously.

"He's talking to me." Alan's face cleared. "But I'm not going under. I believe your treatment did the trick, Brave."

THE pilot relaxed and deliberately spat on the rug. Brave reached out an arm like a tree trunk and slapped the tanned cheek, so the head rocked sideways. "We aren't going to be gentle with you, pal," said Don. "Face that. We aren't playing for marbles."

Grady did not speak. Brave took eight strips of light wood, narrow and about two inches long, from his pocket. Kneeling, he fitted them neatly under the pilot's well-manicured and rather long nails. The

man flipped them out with a convulsive motion of the fingers; Brave impassively brought his enormous fist down like a hammer on the back of the fellow's right hand. Grady shrieked.

"Do that again and I'll break the other one," said Brave.

"You red-skinned bastard!" howled Grady, "you did bust it up."

"I meant to. I wanted to see if you'd be quick enough this time to simulate pain."

Had Alan not known better, he would have sworn the pilot was actually suffering. "What are you talking about? Why in blue hell shouldn't I feel pain?"

"Because you're a mutant, and we know you can't. Why can't you, I wonder," muttered Brave in a conversational tone, fitting the splinters under the nails again. "Pain is a necessity of life as we know it. It warns you of danger. A man could be sliced off up to the waist without noticing it, except for pain. Why would the next higher animal to man in the scale of evolution have lost the sensation of pain? It doesn't make sense."

"That's the first thing you've said that I agree with or understand. It doesn't make sense. You're all nuts."

"Come off it," said Alan. "You have given yourself away too often. Don't go back to the old innocent routine."

Rob Pope said, "Suppose they can regenerate lost appendages? It isn't

as mad as it sounds. Suppose that welder slipped away and grew himself a new hand? In the case of such a beast, what good would pain be to him? It'd be no more than a nuisance. The lack of pain then becomes an intelligent development—but only then."

"What devils they must be," said Don, staring at Grady. "Right out of the swamps of Hell."

Brave said to the pilot, "Now I'm going to ask you a question. If you give me a fair answer I'll take out one of these sticks. If you don't, I'll drive it into you—under the nail it hurts about as bad as anything can—and light it. It's an old trick and it works wonders as a tongue-loosener. Here's the question: are you a mutant of our race, a superman?"

Grady looked at him for a moment and then he laughed. He was still laughing when Brave hit the stiff wood with a hammer and sank it beneath the nail. Then he screamed.

"You do that real well. It sounds as if that hurt you. Keep it up if you like; it won't bother me. I'm an Indian, Mr. Grady. I'm as sensitive and humane as the next guy until I'm up against somebody who fights unfairly, who's mean and cruel and treacherous; then I turn cold and I say to myself, how shall I fight this brute? and if torture is the best answer, I use it without any qualms. That's sense, it seems to me. Well, I hate your uncanny

guts, Mr. Grady, and all your crew; and there isn't any way to fight you that I can see, so I'll torture you. And even if I'm nine-tenths certain that you aren't feeling it, still it eases me a little to hear you whoop and yell. And there's that tenth of my brain that says maybe you are feeling it. I hope you are. I really hope you are."

He lit the wood: it was synthetic, a very light, hard compound of fibers that burnt with a quick flame, as hot as the heart of a coal. It reached the nail—and curled it back in two shavings of black char; and Grady almost shattered his throat with his roaring.

"Brave," said Alan, "stop it! He does feel it!"

"You raving maniacs, certainly I feel it!" Grady cried. "Where'd you get the idea I couldn't? You're all mad!"

Don Mariner said calmly, "I'll tell you why he doesn't feel it. Just look at his face." They all did so, uncomprehending. "He isn't sweating," said Don triumphantly, "and he hasn't even turned pale!"

Grady turned his head toward the engineer. "Oh, you fat little blob of stupidity," he said icily. "You stand there with your idiot companions and your bright little idea that's about as wrong as wrong can get. Of course I'm not sweating. I haven't any sweat glands. I haven't any pores. And naturally I can't turn pale. This is my na-

tural color. I'm no damned human chameleon. But I can feel pain, in spite of your driveling theories. What do you want to know?" He spat again. "I won't sit here and take this agony for anyone. What the blazes can you do to us if you do know? You can't touch us. Go on, ask away."

"Are you mutants?" asked Brave. "No."

"Are you human?"

"Not as you understand it."

"Where did you come from?"

The pilot sneered. "From the ninth planet of a sun, unknown to you," he said.

Brave glanced back at Alan. "Think he's lying?"

"I swear I don't know."

"I'm not lying," said Grady. "Want to know how I got out of that disk alive? I heard the damn machinery shifting in front of me—oh yes, my ears are sharper and my sight's better, and I can move a lot faster than you can—so I spread myself out thin against the back of the seat. Lucky for me the monster stopped an inch short of my guts. Want to see how I did it? Will that convince you?"

Then he did an incredible, a terrible thing to see: he seemed to turn almost fluid, and though none of his features changed, they withdrew to the sides; his whole body thinned out and flattened along the chair back, and he became a caricature of a man run over by a steam roller. Then he laughed at them.

Above Rob's gasp and Alan's cry came the shriek of Don Mariner. Then he had swept Brave aside and fired a grenade pistol almost in the face of the pilot; and Grady died without a sound.

**"N**O recriminations," said Alan. "You can't see a thing like that and hold your hand. If I'd been armed I'd have done it myself."

Brave was running his hands over the exposed flesh of the dead pilot. "This is weird stuff," he said. "It isn't human—well, that's obvious. It feels vaguely like gutta-percha. It's swelling up slowly. No, by glory, it's going back into shape again. It's becoming humanoid again." He looked up. "Notice how that word springs to the mind? Humanoid. He wasn't human, he told the truth about that. He wasn't even superhuman. He was alien."

Don Mariner, still shaking, said, "I'm sorry I shot him. I just went out of my head at that stunt he pulled. Never been so scared in my life. I sure fouled up our chances of learning how and whom to fight."

"What can you do to us if you do know? You can't touch us." That was Rob Pope musing aloud. "What did he mean by that? That they're so powerful it doesn't matter now if we know about them?"

"You could put any interpretation on it," said Alan.

"Before we theorize any more,"

said Bill Thihling from the door, "you'd better know there's an air taxi headed this way. It's a Manhattan job and I thought it might be McEldownie again, but you never know. So what do we do with the corpse you birds so casually created?"

Brave said promptly, "The garbage disposal unit. It'll take care of him in thirty seconds—and very appropriate too." He hoisted the body of the pilot out of the chair, after cutting the wires. As he carried it off to the kitchen and the hidden well that was the disposal unit, Alan opened a camouflaged wall cupboard and took out the all-vac. Switching it on, he ran its round nozzle over the gouts and stains of blood on the rug, the walls, and the chair. It sucked them into itself like an anteater inhaling a hill of ants, leaving no trace of discoloration. Whipping it back into its nook, and tossing the long pieces of wire in after it, he slammed the door and turned round.

"That's that. We're clean. If it's Mac, we tell him the truth; otherwise. Grady was never here. Right?"

Bill opened the door. McEldownie was just coming up the walk.

"Cheers, gang. The eminent statesman is put off. We're set for tonight. What crimes have you been committing?"

"Oh, kidnapping and murder," said Alan. The announcer dropped to the couch.

"You're jesting, I trust?"

"In a gnat's eye," said Mariner. "You're just thirty seconds too late to see the corpse." He told Jim briefly what they had done. The bony man did not say anything for a few moments, and then, "Jeebling-rusalem! You caught one, and pumped him and slew him out o' hand, all in the time it took me to fly to the studio and back. What a bunch of thugs. The Black Hand could have taken lessons from you." He leaned forward as Brave came in. "Well, you seem to have got precious little out of him before young Donald here got peeved, but let's coordinate it and see what we have."

"One, he could do miraculous things with his physical structure," said the Indian. "It's the first wholly sure thing we've learned since we saw the welder burn off his hand without flinching."

"Two," put in Alan, "he said his kind aren't mutants, but aliens from another system. It may be true. Lord knows. We have only his word."

"Three, he claimed to feel pain, and if he was faking, he was a class A actor," said Rob Pope. "I'll tell you why: I was pretty sensitive to his brain waves, even when he wasn't broadcasting at us. Once I thought I caught a plea for help to someone unnamed. And every time Brave hurt him, I felt that he was actually suffering."

"I felt it too," agreed Alan.

**B**RAVE, getting out bottles of Scotch and rye, said, "In the minute I had to examine his skin and flesh, I found he wasn't lying about his being without pores. The skin was perfectly smooth. It felt rather like a kind of rubber, though not so much so as to seem inhuman to a casual touch. And his body assumed the human shape after death, so it would appear to be the natural form of the beasts." He passed one bottle to Rob and the other to Mac. The six allies drank deeply. Through two bottles they discussed the enemy; coming at last to a sort of half-conclusion, that there were extraterrestrials who could change their shapes within limits, and there were others, either from the same strange world or existing as a mutation of Earthmen, who were impervious to pain. The aliens, Alan and his crew decided, were susceptible to it. The near-tangible thought waves from the tormented pilot had been too agonized to deny.

It was then a little past four in the afternoon.

"A bit more than three hours before we need to leave for the station," said Thihling, "if we take one of the colony's air taxis. What say we relax and loaf and forget for part of those three hours?"

Alan got up and went sprawling at full length on the deep-napped rug. "I'm for that. Let's loosen up. Loll around. My God, I'm as strung up as Captain Kidd."

"I thought you fell down on purpose," said Rob. "But if you're capable of turning phrases like that; I guess you're just too drunk to stand."

Unquote found Alan and sat down with an air of modest ownership in the small of his back. Brave got out more bottles. "We ought to be drinking to things," he said. "There should be witty toasts and pledges to fair maidens. Bumpers should be drained to the memory of gay college days and friends long gone."

He passed the rye to McEldownie, who said, "We ought to be sucking this booze out of old ivy-covered pewter mugs, then, instead of giving each other our loathsome diseases. More collegiate, y'know."

The Indian took a healthy gulp of bourbon. He sighed appreciatively and flipped the bottle through the air and Bill caught it and had it uncorked and upended in the same motion, dexterous as a conjurer. "Ah," he said, choking and spluttering, "smooth!" He passed it to Alan, who nearly upset Unquote in reaching for it; the cat dug her claws into the rough fabric of his coat, glared at the back of his neck, and spoke sharply and at some length concerning the irreverence of certain men.

"Puss, simmer down," said Jim. "Your master drinketh."

"Now there's a bad word in its context," said Alan gravely. "You know nothing about cats, Mac,

m'boy. Nobody was ever a cat's master. If Napoleon kept a cat, it bullied him."

"Napoleon, my illiterate friend, had an intense fear of cats. So obviously he didn't own one."

"If Tamerlane had a cat, it bullied him. If Genghis Khan—"

"You've made your point. Send the alky on its way," said Don.

"Brave, pass around the old ivy-covered pewter mugs," Alan said grandly, rolling over and precipitating a furious Unquote to the rug. "While you're at it, get some old ivy-covered crackers and cheese."

"I could stomach an old ivy-covered potato chip," murmured Rob Pope.

"Let's have a little masculine nostalgia," said Bill. "Let's remember Oxford, Brave."

Four strictly - American - college men hooted him down.

**B**RAVE brought glasses and a tray of snacks, and, thoughtfully, a dish of milk for Unquote. "Here comes old ivy-covered Brave now," said Rob. The big Indian emptied a fifth of rye into the glasses. Jim picked up the empty bottle, regarded it like Hamlet with the skull of Yorick, and said, "Blessed blue ruin, how I love thee. Omar had nothing on McEldownie."

"McEldownie the Tentmaker," said Alan. "It has a fine classic ring to it."

"I pawned my fine classic ring last week. I was hungry."

"God," said Bill. "Classic of '58, I presume?"

They finished the rye and after serious consultation opened a bottle of Scotch. McEldownie began to talk with a broad Highland accent and it seemed very funny to everyone. Unquote stalked away to her playbox in disgust. Brave sat bolt upright, looking like a statue of copper-colored granite. They all got drunk.

The announcer stood up and juggled three glasses, then four, and the others applauded, for he was good at it. "For all your awkward look, Mac," said Alan, "you're a skilful—skilful old bird."

"When I juggled before the crowned heads of Europe, they went mad over me. I often wished I could juggle in front of whole people," he added wistfully. "Never did. Just heads."

"Oh, brother," said a woman's voice. They all turned round and looked toward the door. Win Gilmore stood there, shaking her beautiful blued coiffure. "This place looks like a shebeen. And you're all fried to the eyeballs. Ought to be ashamed of yourselves." She dropped her lavender cloak; she was wearing an amethyst-colored halter and a pleated nylon skirt of syenite blue, which clung to her legs as she walked toward them. Alan could see the play of muscles in her thighs where the soft skirt touched them. Some of the liquor sank away from his brain and he remem-

bered that this woman was not human. He gritted his teeth and turned his head away to look at Brave. The Indian was also sobered. He said, "Well, hello," uncertainly.

"It makes me mad," said Win, pouring herself a shot of rum. "All this attractive male virility going to waste. No women to appreciate it. There ought to be wenches flung picturesquely here and there."

"You paint a sordid picture, madame," said Rob. "We've been chastely reliving old school days, knotting old school ties, and reciting the Boy Scout oath to each other. It's uplifting. It's—"

"Sophomoric?"

"Who is this dazzling fluff?" McEldownie asked.

"Win Gilmore."

The tall man opened his green eyes wide. "Oho? The super-jade!"

WIN regarded him without affection. "Who the hell are you, and what the hell do you mean by that crack?"

"Your secret is known, harridan," said Jim. He stared into her wide eyes. "Alan says you can't feel pain. That makes you one of the enemy in our book. If it weren't for your perfection of form, I myself would take pleasure in booting you in the left nostril." He let his gaze wander over her well-stocked amethyst halter. "Alan," he said critically, "far be it from ol' Mac to question your judgment, but I

doubt this lassie's inhumanity. I really feel we've made another error. If she isn't human, then I'm a rhinoceros."

"You look more like a starving stork," Win cried furiously. "Alan, who is this wretch?"

"Peace, gal, I'm standing up for you, no matter what it sounds like. Doc, you can't convince me that a gal with a balcony that'd grace the Palace Theatre isn't human. I think you're wrong."

"Of course she's good looking. She's a step above us in the evolutionary scale, isn't she?" snarled Alan. "Or else she's from some goddam planet out in the other galaxies." Win looked at him blankly.

"I think you've jumped to a conclusion when you should have crawled to it." McEldownie took a step forward and caught Win's eyes with his own. "I believe you can feel pain," he said.

"Good Lord, of course I can feel —ouch!" She gave a little scream. The announcer had pinched her sharply on the naked flesh just below her halter. Because she had been looking into his eyes, she could not have seen the casual motion of his hand.

"There!" said Jim, standing back and bowing with a juggler's flourish. "What about that, gentlemen?"

Brave spoke. "Win, he's drunk, so don't hold it against him. But he's done you—and us—a great service." Raising his voice above her passionate cursing, he went on.

"You know our mutant theory. It's been changed today but the pain angle still holds good to a degree. Well, Alan burnt you accidentally with his Rocketeer cigarette last night, and you didn't feel it; so we have been thinking that you must be one of them. Evidently you're not. You have our apologies all round."

She stood silent, taking it in; then she said, "Great heavens above!" and turned on Alan, who was looking sheepish and incredibly relieved. "You grunt-brain! Don't you, with all your knowledge, realize that there are times in a woman's life—yes, and in a man's—when she or he can be burned, whipped, and kicked in the funny bone, without realizing it?"

Alan made a gesture of incomprehension.

"You moron, what were we doing when you burned me?"

Brave reached into the encyclopedia of his mind and said, "She's right, governor. It was first explained in 1952. When one is sexually stimulated, the increase in blood pressure, the intensified heartbeats, and the rigidity of all the muscles sometimes combine to make one totally unaware of pain. The author of the theory was a Dr. Linsey, or Kinsey, or something like that." He pursed his lips. "I don't suggest that you were necking, chieftain, but if you were, that explains it, and we were damned unjust to Win."

"If you weren't necking, Doc," said Jim, "you're dead, or ought to be."

Win tossed down her rum. "I'll have more to say on the subject later," she declared to Alan. "For now, I'm too mad to risk staying here and breaking up the furniture. I found that burn on my arm after you left. By then it hurt like hell." She strode over and picked up her cloak. "Good night, or afternoon, or whatever the everlastingly blasted time it is," she said between her teeth, and closed the door gently behind her which made a more effective exit than if she had slammed it and made the walls quiver.

"Bless my soul," said Jim mildly, reaching for his glass. "We have transformed a superwoman into a livid Fury. What a day!"

## CHAPTER VII

**B**RAVE passed around anticohol tablets, those excellent remedies for drunkenness developed in Japan in 1957; and they all ate them and drank water and looked at one another and grinned. "That was quite a bat while it lasted," said Don.

McEldownie rested his head on the couch and closed his eyes. Occasionally the tablets would put one to sleep for a short time. Rob Pope said, "We've had our reaction against all the shocks, and it was a luxury I think we deserved; but now we've got to plot and plan."

"The telecast is our first big hope. Let's put our heads together."

"And produce a sickening thud," said Jim, opening his eyes. "Okay we'll see what we can do. Or more likely," he said thoughtfully, "what we can't do."

The door opened and Win came in, a look of contrition on her face. They all gaped at her. "Well," she said to Alan, "it's like this. I'm sorry. I blew my cork. I was insulted. I'm not any more. I know the strain you've been under and I realize it was an awful coincidence to happen just when it did. I forgive you and your tame flamingo with the wandering hands. Can I help?"

"Take a pew," said Alan relieved beyond words. "We're talking out the telecast. You can help, sweetheart."

WHEN it was time to leave—they had decided to take Rob Pope's station wagon rather than an air taxi—Brave locked up the house. Both he and Alan felt they might not be able to come back to it, at least not soon. Just before he shut the front door, a brown blur shot past him and landed on Alan's chest. Unquote clung there, claws entangled in his jacket, great blue eyes begging with false humility to be taken along. "I nearly forgot you, kitten," he said. He boosted her up to his shoulder and the eight of them got into the station wagon,

which Brave then wheeled about and sent roaring toward Manhattan.

Just before eight they entered the studio. McEldownie said, "How about you lads waiting in the reception room? If anybody comes raging into the place for our hides, you can cause 'em a certain amount of trouble before they get to Doc and me."

Brave looked reluctant, then agreed. The others trooped out. Jim said, "You can watch it on the monitor," and locked the door behind them. "There's an extra precaution. Now for it, Doc. Cross your fingers."

The lights came on.

Alan talked well. Just at first, while McEldownie was giving him a purposely vague introduction, he felt rather light-headed; this passed quickly. He had the feeling that something had tried to insert itself into his thoughts. Whatever it was, it failed, he said thankfully. Mac finished his introduction. Alan began to speak.

He gave it to his audience straight and fast, without preamble, lest an engineer or official with access to the controls should be a mutant or alien.

*"Listen to me. There are enemies among us, enemies from another world, or perhaps sports of our own species. We are all in deadly danger."*

He spoke coolly and sanely. There could be no mistaking his competence

to talk on the subject, he thought, I sound like an old statesman. And if that's vanity, let it be.

After sketching in the incidents which had led to his suspicions, he told of the disks' unsuspected power, and of the pilot who could expand his body inhumanly in any direction. He did not mention Grady's death. He stressed the need for immediate action. "What that action must be, I don't presume to suggest. There are many men more qualified to tell you that than I am. But here are ideas . . ."

Seek them out, he said. Try to recall incidents, accidents, that made no sense to you. Try to remember instances of lack of pain. I'm sorry I can't give you more identifying traits, but that's all we know so far. Except the lack of pores, the heightened senses.

There will be trouble. I feel sure there will be bloodshed. Don't quail, don't despair. We'll beat them. We're essentially a decent race and from all indications they are devious, malevolent, and evil.

And we outnumber them, that's pretty certain.

Don't flinch. Don't hesitate. Seek them out. Capture them, kill them, but *find them!*

He was really a little proud of himself as the telecast ended. He even felt light-headed again, and ascribed it to pride.

McEldownie clapped him on the shoulder. "Well, boy, if this mess pans out okay, you and I can take

our pick of soft government posts, or retire on the bounty of a grateful world. Let's see what the gang thought of it."

He unlocked the door and opened it. Brave stood on the threshold, his dark face bewildered; the others crowded behind him, worried, tense. "Alan," said his friend, "what went wrong?"

Alan's belly shrank back and sweat broke out on his palms. "What do you mean, Brave? Didn't it go on the air?"

"It must have," Jim said. "I was watching a monitor."

"It went on, all right." Brave sighed. He looked as beaten as an Indian can ever look. "I should have guessed they wouldn't let you do it. They'd get to you some way, both of you."

"For the love of God, Brave, what are you talking about?" cried Alan. The other rested his hands on the scientist's shoulders.

"Son," he said quietly, "you talked about fuel. The two of you talked for fifteen minutes about the newest developments in rocket fuel. You never said a damned word about the enemy race!"

## CHAPTER VIII

"**S**o now we're all but helpless," said Bill Thihling, wiping his mouth. They had just finished three enormous platters of curried chicken at an exotic Bengali restaurant on 49th Street. "Where there's

life, et cetera, but so long as the aliens control our very tongues, what can we do? Echo answers, Nothing."

"I blame myself for it," growled Brave. "I should have gone on the telecast; or Rob, maybe. We can withstand hypnotism, know how to fight it, while Alan had already had one bad dose of it. It must have been easy to recapture his mind."

"What about me?" objected Jim. "I've never been mesmerized before. I didn't feel a thing, either, or hear voices, nor nothin'."

"Are you sure you haven't been hypnotized? Alan didn't know it till I found out under mechanical-visual trance."

"Gad, maybe I have been, then," murmured Jim uncertainly.

"They got to Alan and Mac," said Rob. "Had you or I tried it, Brave, they'd have done something more violent; blasted the station off the air, killed us. They undoubtedly have their eyes on us, and we can't get in touch with humanity again. We're on an island surrounded by a sea of cynical, sneering demons; they won't let us do anything but make despairing futile signals to the mainland."

"Brother," said Win, "are we getting poetical in our sorrow! Listen, I have a feeling we oughtn't to go back to Project Star. They must be grouping to wipe us out by now. They know us, they're not dumb; they'll be after us." She bent over the table and all the others did likewise. "Suppose we go up to Central

Park? Sit out there all night, loll on the sward and talk. We won't be hunted there. And perhaps by morning some solution will have occurred to us."

"That's the best thought any of us have had," said Rob Pope. "Fresh night air! I know this washed and filtered stuff is the best atmosphere for you, but I crave some real old-fashioned germ-polluted air."

So they took the station wagon up to the park, and walked onto the grass that was already spangled with moisture under the moon; on a knoll surrounded by trees they flung down blankets from the trunk of the car, and stretched out and tasted the night that was brought to them on a softly brisk little-breeze; and Alan said, "Mother Nature! You can't beat the old girl. She makes you see sparks of light where you know there's nothing but the dark."

They lay there and talked and napped and drank and relaxed through the night, till dawn rose gray and turned to blue and the sun came up. For no reason but their physical comfortableness, they all felt good. Even Unquote was gay and frisked like a kitten. Their fantastic trouble seemed smaller and further away than it had ever been . . .

WHEN the first great disk came down on the city, skimming the treetops of Central Park, heading straight for the Times Square

district at that height and rising only when it seemed certain that it would smash itself against one or another of the buildings of Manhattan, none of them could speak for surprise. They stared up, amazed, as the whirling silver surface caught their eyes with its glancing beams of sun reflection; and it was incredible to them that the disk should be there in the bright morning sky.

It vanished over Brooklyn, tilting on edge and shooting straight up into emptiness.

"Well, if this isn't the feeble-minded pinnacle of idiocy," exclaimed Don Mariner. "A test flight over the city itself! What drooling sub-human intellect ordered that one?"

In the distance a muted babbling arose, as the city caught its breath and began to talk excitedly about the flying saucer, the first (barring some fugitive glimpses in the '40s and '50s which had never been properly verified) that New York had seen.

Then the disk came back. It led a wobbling formation, two sister ships just behind it and then a gap and three more, all going at a hawk-fast clip and slanting down out of the eastern sky to zoom over the park once more in an uncanny, wavering, noiseless line. Jim McEldownie leaped to his feet, his narrow face, with the green eyes staring out, a twisted mask of panic terror. Alan was shaken, as much by the lean man's fear as by the sight of the disks. "Mac, Mac," he shout-

ed, "what is it?" For he could see nothing to dread that was worse than the thing they had been living with for the past hours.

Jim stared after the disappearing ships. "They aren't ours," he said, his voice gurgling and choking with the fear. "*They aren't ours!*"

"Of course they are," snapped Brave. He too had risen, and stood like an age-old oak beside the quavering poplar that was McEldownie. "Whose would they be?" he reasoned. "Do you suppose any country could manufacture those things without our men on Albertus spying them out?"

"I tell you they aren't our ships!" cried Jim, taking the Indian by the lapels. "I know our designs up and down, and those aren't ours! Tell him, Mariner."

"He's right," said Don, white as paper. "The superstructure's all wrong. And they're bigger, I think, than ours."

"Don't forget that *Homo superior*, or his cousins from the space lanes, may have changed the plans without letting you in on it," said Bill Thihling bitterly. "Great God! Nobody but a callous, egotistical mutant or alien, unacquainted with pain and insensitive to our safety, would fly a squadron of virtually untested disks over a crowded city. This is misanthropy with a vengeance!"

Mac groaned. "You bumbling dinkey engines," he said, "can't you get off that one track? I tell you

these things don't come from Project Star—they don't even come from Earth!"

Win spoke for the first time. She was still seated, the cat cradled against her breast. "I think you're right," she said. "I feel it; you're right. Those aren't human beings in those ships. They're from black space somewhere. They know we are reaching out for the stars and they've come to stop us." Her tone was level and wholly undramatic. "We'd be a menace, rampaging through the systems. They won't let us begin. Their spies here, Grady and his ilk, have called them down to stop us."

Brave and Alan frowned at each other. Each asked the other wordlessly, Where are these two getting such wild conceptions? What do they see—what do they *know*, that we don't?

THE saucers returned, in a different formation this time; like a V of geese. Geese made of glittering blue-silver metal, round geese traveling at eight hundred miles an hour. They roared overhead: soundlessly, yes; but with so swift and terrible a movement that one could call it nothing but a silent roar. In that instant Alan, staring upward, felt his convictions dissolve. Mac was right. He did not know enough about the design of Project Star's disks to say that these were different; but he knew suddenly that there was an alien *feel* to these

things, an aura of irrelation, a stupendous pulsation that pervaded the senses and forced the knowledge on him that here was nothing terrestrial, nothing human or even superhuman.

Watching them shoot over, he tried weakly to find an analogy, to anchor his wits to some concrete remembrance and save them from scattering in panic. All he could think of was the night when he, aged six or seven, had wakened to know positively and without question that there was a ghost in the room with him. Even yet he was sure there had been a ghost. And this sense of alienness that came from the flying disks was the same as that he had felt in the night, when the invisible ghost crouched in a corner and mewed at him. An outsider, said his blood and viscera to him, a stranger from the cold hells of unknown space. An alien, said the wisdom drawn out of nowhere by primeval instincts lying in the murk at the bottom of his soul.

He moved to Brave and put a hand on one of the mighty arms and saw that Brave knew it now too. "Grady's kin," said the Indian. No one else spoke except Unquote, who gave a bizarre Siamese screech of rage.

Back they came, this time from the direction of Richmond, in a strung-out dipping line; and out of the crystal bubble in the belly of the leader there fell a shining golden egg, a tiny thing at this distance,

seen only because the sun caught at it and played along its surface. It fell slowly, far too slowly for an Earth-hatched egg; Thihling and Mariner automatically judged its descent at six or eight feet per second. Either it was full of a light gas, or it had some form of anti-gravity mechanism attached to it. Leisurely it dropped toward Manhattan.

Then the people began to run.

All the millions who had been taught to act calmly and sanely in an emergency lost their heads; they were suddenly so many witless chickens who had caught sight of the axe. With the dropping of the golden egg, the terror of alien danger had clutched at them all. So they fled. There was no place to flee to, but they fled. Into subways and out again, insane with the horror of dying underground. Into buildings, to know the walls were collapsing on them, to run out once more. And the egg fell lazily toward them. Now it had passed the spire of the tallest skyscraper.

UP in the park, people were running too. Alan and his group stood together and watched them helplessly. "Like field mice from an owl," muttered Rob Pope. They saw a woman dash straight into a tree, carom off with a cry and go on. An elderly man came up to them; faltered, put a hand to his chest and pitched over at their feet. Bill turned him over. He was dead.

"Heart attack. Poor devil."

Alan did not know why none of his friends ran. He repeated a random line that came into his head: "Stand and fight and see your slain, and take the bullet in your brain . . ."

Or the atomic blast, or the unimaginable projectile from the inconceivable weapon.

Then Jim McEldownie yelled, "On your faces, for God's sake!" and Alan turned from the city and flung himself down and covered his head with his arms.

And the world opened up and a mushroom from Hell sprouted over Manhattan, and the buildings rocked and tottered and crashed to earth. The sky went black and the great white-yellow cloud, perimetered with blood-scarlet, arose against it; the universe shook and shattered and then came together and righted itself and sailed on. The Empire State was the last of the tall structures to hit ground. Clear at the northern tip of Central Park they felt that final smashing, a post script to a letter from Lucifer.

From Fulton Street to 53rd, from the North River to Stuyvesant Town, nothing lived. In that terrible instant of fission, caught wherever they were, whatever they were doing, working at desks, peering from windows, running down deserted alleys or pushing madly against the press of maniac crowds on Broadway and Fifth and Madison, score upon score of thousands of

men and women died; died screaming or weeping or fighting for breath, praying to their gods or cursing or dumb with dismay.

They died in subways, never having known that the silver ships of the enemy were sailing above their great town. They died asleep in their hotel rooms, lifting forkfuls of breakfast eggs to their mouths, typing words on paper, making love, staring at the sky.

Very few of them wanted to die. Some of them expected to live for many years. Some of them did not really expect to die at all. Many of them could accept the fact that death would come for every man in the world some day . . . except themselves; that was incredible and not to be thought of at all.

But they all died.

It came so quick, so quick; and even those who believed the golden egg to be a bomb never knew when it struck and smashed out at them and obliterated them, for the quickness was that of death, the swiftest thing that walks the universe:

Beyond the huge area of instant perfect destruction, many others died. Tall buildings collapsed on them, or they fell into the splits and great fissures that opened in the earth; they were hurled to the pavements and their brains spilled out, or the noise and the fearful rush of air got into their heads and tore their cerebra to tatters. Some of them could not bear the appal-

ling horror of the bomb, and slit their own throats or put guns into their mouths and pulled the triggers. Some went so totally mad that their life forces disintegrated and they died where they stood, of madness and panic and the terrible knowledge of their impotence.

Men lived, too: lived blind and wounded and lamed and torn asunder, lived without minds and minds strangely contorted and warped. No one who had been in Manhattan that day survived without scars of body and brain left by the death of the city.

The golden egg had hatched its chick of death at eight-fifty-three of a Friday morning in June of 1970.

After a while, when the hurricane had dropped away and the earth had stilled its shaking, Alan sat up and looked toward the heart of the city. The disks were gone — and so were the people and the buildings, the life and the fine aspiring skyline of Manhattan. Nothing was left but a leveled, broken, sawtoothed waste, over which hovered the direful mushroom cloud.

Grotesquely, irrelevantly, all his mind could focus on in that moment of near-insanity was his cat. "Where's Unquote?" he asked harshly. "Where's little Unquote?"

The cat spoke furiously above his head. She had flown into a tree at the blast. He coaxed her down as the others stood and brushed themselves off and stared at the

atomic cloud. At last she bounced from a crotch of the tree into his arms. She was shivering with terror.

Bill said urgently, his voice no more than a croak, "Let's make tracks. Lord knows what scuds of radioactivity will be blowing our way soon, if that wind didn't bring 'em already."

"All those people," whispered Win. Now the screams and howls of survivors could be heard where they stood. "All those poor people."

"The wagon's liable to be stolen if we don't get to it," said Don. "Come on. Please."

There were still men and women running through the park, some shouting with fear, some white and sick and mute. A couple passed them, their eyes round and horrified, the man's coat torn and the girl's green dress ripped off one shoulder. They must have fallen, or been caught in a fight. There were two men brawling over by the reservoir.

There seemed to be no balance or reason left in mankind, save for the seven on the knoll, who clung to their sanity only by conscious physical effort.

Now they ran for the station wagon, to find its windows broken, the upholstery slashed by a knife, the windshield shattered. "Berserk", said Rob Pope. "They've all gone berserk."

"It does that to me, too" said Don. "I want to sink my teeth into something and worry it. I can't touch

the enemy and so I want to take it out on something I *can* touch." He shrugged. "If you were lost in Hell, and found a car, and couldn't start it because you didn't have the key, wouldn't you get sore enough to wreck it? How are the tires?"

Brave said, "Okay. He was too mad to think of them." He knocked the remaining shards of windshield from the frame and got in behind the wheel. They all piled in. He started it and it rolled off northward.

McElownie said, "No, Brave. Go down towards town. I want to get to a radio or TV station. We've got to try to establish contact with the rest of the world. This may have happened in other cities too." He leaned forward and put his hand on Brave's shoulder. "I don't think we need worry about radioactivity," he said. "These are beings from another planet, obviously much farther advanced than we are. Their weapons, though producing an apparently atomic cloud, would probably be without post-explosion danger. They'd have eliminated the radioactive dust because they'd want to land and take over at once, or at least quite soon. Let's take a chance. Let's go down toward Times Square."

Brave glanced back at him. The argument was specious, as a basis for action it wouldn't hold water. But Alan said, "I think so too, Brave. It sounds logical." Win and

Don agreed. Brave looked at them. He was about to argue and then the fatalism of his ancient race seemed to grip him. They ought to get to a radio station, true; and if the city were radioactive, what did it matter in the long run? They were only seven people and a cat; ranged against them on one hand stood the ranks of shadowy supermen and aliens, on the other the unknown disk-people. The world was in chaos. He could not dredge up enough ego to believe that he and Alan and the others would be very important in the ordering of that chaos. He shucked off his science and his civilized thought processes and he said, "All right. We'll go down." Stoically, the very incarnation of his thrice-great grandfather Pony Sees-the-Sky, he wheeled the car around and sent it hurtling toward Times Square.

Broadway was a shambles. As far up as Columbus Circle all the windows were gone, the light standards had been curved by the blast, autos were overturned and leaking gas and oil. There were cracks in the paving. Occasional men and women staggered along northward, and bodies lay in the gutters, across the thresholds. The wreckage of an air taxi half-blocked the way, corpses spilt halfway out of its doors.

"How many weapons have we?" asked Mac suddenly. "There's a sporting goods store. We ought to load up on guns. There's no telling what maniacs we'll be meeting; and

if there's an occupation, we might have to be guerrillas." He pulled back his coat. "I have a grenade pistol, for a start."

Brave had one, and an automatic for longer range work. Don Mariner carried another grenade pistol. Win had her derringer-sized automatic in her purse. That was all they had. Brave pulled to the curb. He and Alan got out.

The store had lost its windows. Brave stepped through onto the display ledge and dropped inside. A voice in the gloom said, "Stand right there, mister." The proprietor, white and tense, leaned over his counter and held a .45 revolver steadily, its muzzle looking at the Indian's chest. "One more step and you join them." Brave saw there were bodies on the floor.

"I'm no looter, man," he said sharply. "I'll buy guns."

The fellow considered that. "By God, you sound sane. And you look like a good man. Everybody's crazy out there. You come back and pick yourself out something. We're going to need sane men with guns in this mess."

"Men are fighting each other," nodded Brave. "The blast drove them crazy."

"Can't tell me anything about that. One of those bodies was my brother. I couldn't let even my brother loose in this hell with a gun, not when he'd gone out of his head. Tried to kill me for a gun." The face was drawn and cold. "How

about a .30-'06?" he asked. "Stop a grizzly if you're good enough. Heavy though."

"I wasn't looking for an air rifle," said Brave. Alan came in through the window. "He's with me. We have five others outside."

"You can have guns for 'em all. Sorry I don't have grenade pistols or flamers. This is a sporting goods store." He handed a .30-'06 across the counter. "Take this. I'll give you all the ammo I have for it. You put it to good use when the Russkis come."

"It wasn't Russians," said Alan, "It was flying saucers."

"Russkis in flying saucers. They'll be coming on the ground pretty soon. Didn't I see 'em come in in Germany in the big war? Take these boxes. Enough ammo to stand a good siege here. Save it all you can. We're going to be at war a long, long, time."

Shortly they came out into the morning air, carrying armloads of heavy rifles, four revolvers, and what seemed half a ton of ammunition.

The owner had at first refused payment, then taken only the wholesale cost. At the last minute he had given each of them a long hunting knife. "You were in Argentina, eh? You can use these. Give 'em what-for, boys." They had offered to take him with them. "I stick," he'd said. "This is my store."

THEY looked up and down the street. There were more people now, and the worst faction was evident — the looters, the sly lurkers who stole from the dead and exhausted and mad, the bestial men on the prowl for women, the ones who had gone lunatic and were bent on senseless destruction. A policeman, his uniform bloody, came toward them as they handed the guns into the station wagon; suddenly he whipped out his pistol and fired. A teen-aged boy came flopping and shrieking out of a store window, where he had been filling his pockets with candy and jackknives and junk. The cop came abreast of them, his eyes lit with insane anger. Brave reached out and hit him on the jaw and he fell. "There was no call to shoot that kid," said Brave. He picked up the pistol and threw it into a drain. From up and down Broadway came scattered yells and sounds of gunfire.

They got into the wagon and Brave drove down to 57th Street. There was a mob of maddened men who fought each other and ran howling toward the car when they saw it. "Turn right," said Jim urgently. "There's a little independent radio station about two blocks away. With luck we can get in — and out to the rest of the country. Unless that damned bomb smashed the place." They drew quickly away from the mob, which went back to fighting among themselves.

They found the station apparent-

ly safe; many of the smaller buildings here had been protected by the larger from the force of the blast. With Don left to guard the wagon and guns, they ran into the place. The elevators had stopped. The men, with Win, trotted up four flights, to find a door marked with radio call letters. "This is it."

At the opening of the door three men turned swiftly from their work, grenade pistols and flamers — flame-throwing handguns — in their fists. "Hold it," said the lanky Jim urgently.

"Bless us all," said one of the men, lowering his weapon, "it's McEldownie! What the hell are you doing in a *radio* station, Mac?"

"I'll eat crow for it, but right now I want to get out on the air," he said. "Can I?"

"God knows. We've sweat blood over the thing. Our own generators are okay, but the city's power is off, and the antennae got mashed up some. Couple of boys up on the roof now, worrying at it. Do you suppose we're loony for staying here?" he asked. Obviously he valued McEldownie's opinion. Alan realized for the first time what a reputation the scarecrow-like announcer had.

"No. There seems to be no danger of radioactivity; either the bomb burst in air, or it's a new kind. We've got to get communication established as soon as possible. You're almost the only sane people we've seen."

"Most of our gang went out to

try and get home. We're all bachelors and we figured it was up to us to stay." He ran a hand through his hair. "Who is it, Mac? Who hit us?"

"Martians," said Win.

"Venusians," said Rob Pope.

"Who are all these guys, Mac?"

"Scientists from Project Star."

The three radio men opened their eyes respectfully. "Pounce onto it, will you!" roared Mac. "We've got to get out. We've got to learn what's happened to the world!"

## CHAPTER IX

"Hi, Mac," said a weary voice. "This is Johnny Gibbons, in Frisco. No, they haven't been here, but they've hit half the big cities on the continent. Just heard that Mexico City's flat as a — my brother and his wife were in Mexico City. Vacation. Get away from it all."

"Cheers, Mac," said a deep sad voice. "Roscoe Toddy here. They bombed Chicago. Funny thing: some professors at Northwestern University here in Evanston turned their detectors on Chicago and couldn't get a whiff of radioactivity. Must be a new kind of A-bomb, or X-bomb, or GD-bomb or something."

"Mac," babbled a voice that verged on screaming lunacy, "Mac, you ought to see it. There's nothing left at all, not a thing, not a house or a tree, not a person in the whole place, nothing but waste, waste, Jesus, death all over, I tell you the universe has gone mad!"

They never learned where this voice came from, or what city was gone.

"Well, McEldownie, old horse," said a voice, trained to unctuousness but laced now with intolerable sorrow and strain, "our station was partly wrecked but we finally got this thing in operating condition. Pittsburgh is gone, but we're out in East Liberty and didn't take too much of the blast. It was one bomb, Mac, one lousy big H-bomb or whichever letter they put on the biggest boom they can make. Mac, I'm beat to my socks." The voice coughed tightly. "I saw the Cathedral of Learning go. My God, Mac, what a mighty toppling that was! It folded in and over and you thought it'd make a hole five miles deep, but it's lying there now, just a heap of busted stone, and I went to school there. Dear old Pittsburgh, Alma Mater."

A dark voice that spoke from far away said, "It was the maddest thing I ever saw. This golden oval thing fell about as fast as a feather, and everybody went out of their heads. We all started to run like mice. Cars were jamming Cahuenga and Sunset and Vine, and people were scuttling . . . I don't know why I wasn't killed. I just don't know."

"Yes," said a haunted and somber voice, "we ran. We all poured out into the streets and ran, and fell down and got stepped on and rose and ran and sweated and had heart attacks and died and lost our breath and panted and gulped and ran and

ran and ran. Fort Worth is a shambles, a mucked-up mess."

"No," said a faintly insulted voice, "it wasn't a large bomb, not large at all. It didn't flatten more than four blocks. I was half a mile off when it hit but all I got was a skinned knee from falling. Hang it, why a large bomb on Los Angeles and only a little one on Toronto?"

"Seattle got it," said a smooth southern voice, "and your town, Mac, and L.A., and there isn't a peep out of Moscow but who can tell if they're playing possum? London is smashed; we're getting scraps from the hinterlands of England but London's had it. Paris is on the air. Johnny Jill, poor devil, is crying over there now, wanting to know if Hoboken is okay. We haven't seen the saucers yet in N'Orleans. So ol' Manhattan got the guts torn out of her? Rough, boy, darned rough. We're sorry."

"Austin's gone, gone, I tell you it's all all ALL GONE!" shrieked a slow-dying voice, and that was all it could say.

"Listen to this, Mac," urged a girl's voice, sounding strange and ethereal after the men had spoken so long. "We don't get how they did it, but those disks have thrown a force screen around every army encampment and station in the country, perhaps in the world. At Fort Bragg they mustered and marched out into an invisible wall. They can't penetrate it. It didn't hurt them, it just stopped them cold. Someplace

in Pennsylvania the National Guard got into trucks and lit out for New York and ran into one of the walls that piled them up in heaps. It looks like we're all alone. Nobody's coming to help. We're all alone."

"This is London calling," said a cultured, horrified voice. "Hello, America. Can you hear me? We're not sure we're getting across the Atlantic. We haven't heard anything from you yet. Are you there? Can't you send us some word? This is the B.B.C. calling. London is gone. Bombed out completely. This is actually — actually Greenwich. Are you there? Is all America gone? Oh, this is ghastly, this is the end. Is it the end of the whole world? Are you there?"

## CHAPTER X

DON Mariner, leaning out of the window of the station wagon as the band emerged, said urgently, "One of them landed. It landed just over there a way, I don't think more than half a mile. There aren't any others in sight. This one floated down not half a minute ago."

"What did I say?" exclaimed McEldownie. "They eliminated radioactive dust, so they could come right in after a bombing. It's logical."

"We'll go on foot," said Brave, "though I hate to abandon the car. But we'll have to go on foot over this rubble, and I take it we are going to the thing?"

"We sure are," said Rob Pope.

"Wait a minute. One of us ought to go with Win in the wagon and try to make it back to Project Star. She shouldn't be in this ruckus," protested Alan.

"You think she'd be better off out there with Lord knows how many mutants or supermen or aliens?" asked Bill Thihling. "You're not thinking straight, boy. We've got to stick together. Separate now and we may never see each other again."

"Besides, you can't get rid of me," said Win finally.

Don passed out the heavy sporting rifles, one to each of the men. They each had a sidearm, Brave two, and he and Alan had the wicked knives of the shopkeeper. Win had her little automatic for use in emergencies. Dividing the ammunition, and anchoring Unquote firmly to Alan's left shoulder with lengths of twine fashioned into harness and leash, they set off across the street; passed between buildings and across another street and yet another; and came to the area of near-total destruction. Here the going was precarious and tricky. Brave stared around them.

"Looks like Pergamino when we'd finished with it," he said to his friend.

A queer dead hush followed them about, muffling their footsteps and depressing them as though they crept through a graveyard. "That's what it is," said Alan half-aloud. "The biggest graveyard in the

world." His hands ached to feel the throat of an enemy, to tear out the jugular, to slay and slay. His world had been struck a fantastic, unaccountable blow, and it was dead around him and he and his friends seemed the only living humans from pole to pole.

They passed on, drifting quietly between broken crags that two hours before had been office buildings, hearing the echo of their light footfalls tossed back by windowless walls, and heaps of brick and stone. One passage was clogged breast-high with corpses. They went around it, climbing over powdery granite piles that had been a theater's facade.

THEN there was the broad plain of ruin, a gargantuan bowl, smoothed down from its rim to the center, which was some twenty feet below the original level of the ground. Everything had been smashed here, buildings and trees and everything that stood upright; in the middle of the frightful desolated bowl rested one of the great silver disks, tilted like a gyroscope and balanced on its extreme edge, as though it leaned at its forty-five-degree angle against an invisible wall.

"That settles it," said Don. "Our ships can't do that stunt. Look, it balances like that and the bubble opened up makes an incline to the ground; fit steps inside the bubble and you have a perfect way of getting in and out. Our system is much

clumsier. How the devil do they make it balance, though?"

"They've set up effective force screens around our armies," said Jim. "If they can do that, certainly they can utilize small editions of the screen mechanisms to hold up their saucers."

"Or maybe it's a principle of gyroscopics," added Bill.

"Well," said Brave, "we're going down there. At least I am. Anybody wants to stay here, Lord knows I won't blame him."

"We're all going."

"Okay. First Alan and Bill and I will walk out. If we aren't shot by the time we've gone twenty yards, you four come on. We can't plan anything till we get a look at the brutes in the disk; but as soon as we do, I'll shout out our next move. Is that all right with everyone? Or does one of you want to take charge?"

"You're the chief, Brave," said Rob. "Maybe we outrank you on Project Star, but in action I'd back you against all of us. I've heard about you in Argentina."

"I didn't mean to assume command on the strength of my war record," said Brave seriously. "I simply figured I had the biggest voice and no matter what happens you'll probably be able to hear me. Okay, here we go. Guns at the ready."

They walked out onto the flattened waste that had been New York.

Nothing happened.

When they had been walking for eternity and six days longer, as Alan judged it, figures appeared below the huge disk, coming down the inclined steps or plane in the crystal bubble, grouping on the ground. The Earthmen were then just over an eighth of a mile from the ship.

The aliens looked human; it was difficult to see differences in their structure and that of a man; and they wore clothing that glistened as they moved in the sun. They were setting up three small pieces of machinery beneath the disk. Alan could not guess what they might be.

Then the men in the lead, Brave and Bill and Alan, ran into an unseen wall that knocked them staggering from the force of their own motion. The aliens had set up a screen around their ship.

"Here's where I yell out the plan, I guess," said Brave ruefully. "The plan is to make faces, men. That seems to be the only thing we can do of a warlike nature. God, a force wall! We might have known."

ALAN, who had sat down abruptly when he struck it, jarring the tied-down cat on his shoulder and causing her to sink her claws through the coat into his skin with anger, stood up and felt the air before his face.

"Amazing. Touch this thing, you fellows. It feels like a sheet of hard rubber. It's perfectly tangible. I can almost feel a grain in the thing."

"What scientists they must be!" exclaimed Rob Pope. "This — hey!" he shouted, startled. "Here's an opening!"

Then he had walked on across the bowl. Bill Thihling, nearest him, tried to follow. He found there was no hole there. He skinned his nose on the force screen.

"Rob's crazy," he said. "He thinks there ain't no force wall there. So he walks through it. Only a loon could do it."

Pope came back. "I heard that. What the hell . . . ? It was here a minute ago."

"Can't you get back?"

"No! The wall's solid again. By Jupiter, they let me come through; they wanted to see one of us at a time. All right, I'll play their game." He wheeled and marched straight toward the disk.

"Oh, Rob, come back!" screamed Win. "They'll do something awful to you!"

"Too late now," said Alan, taking her arm. "They've caught him in their cage like a rabbit."

"A fanged rabbit, anyway," said Don. "He's got his guns."

Rob walked under the silver ship, into its shadow. The aliens clustered about him. Beyond the wall of force, the men and the girl held their breath tensely.

After a minute or two, "Why," said Jim McEldownie, "they haven't even taken away his rifle!"

Shortly Rob turned his face toward them and waved. It was an

encouraging motion. Whatever was happening did not seem hostile.

"And yet," said Alan to himself, "these are the devils who smashed Manhattan. They *are* enemies." Even here, on the sloped plain that had been a roaring city, it was hard to realize it. He shook himself. Simply because they had not chopped Rob Pope down immediately, he had begun to slack off his hatred of them. He was growing tired and stupid. He reached into his pocket and took out an antique tablet and swallowed it.

Don Mariner, leaning heavily against the invisible wall, was abruptly shot forward to fall on his belly; the wall had vanished where he stood. Jim reached the spot an instant later, but the screen was whole. Don sat up, and his plump face was pale, but his grin was without panic.

"The Mariners have landed," he said, "and will shortly have the situation well in hand. Hold tight." He went down to the disk and the aliens.

THE waiting grew terrible in its intensity; Bill Thihling took his pulse and found it like a machine gun, even Brave sweated with anxiety, his dark fine face taut and frowning.

He was, as it happened, the next to be admitted to the silver ship's area. Walking through the hole that opened to him, he thrust an arm back through it, trying to hold the force away till Alan had had time

to follow him. Roughly, with a sensation of faint burning, the screen shut down and flung his arm to his side. It was like a sentient animal leaping from the sky to stand between him and his friend. After a moment's hesitation he went to the disk.

Mac came to Alan's side. "Listen, Doc," he said urgently. "Get your girl over here. The three of us are going through this thing together when our time comes."

"How?" And why, thought Alan. Is he scared to walk down over the plain alone? Why Win and me? How about Bill?

"I'll show you. Get up against the wall. I'll idle beside you and Win can stand on the other side. When it opens in front of one of us, the other two will jump like crickets and we'll go in in lock step. Okay?"

"They may blast us if we disregard their obvious wishes." He gestured at the titanic bowl. "They can undoubtedly do it if we peeve them," he said lightly.

"We'll take that chance. I have an idea."

Alan shrugged. What they did seemed unimportant, the activities of a handful of fleas under a microscope.

The screen, as it happened, dissolved before Alan. More properly, he thought, it went up, like a sliding panel under his light-touching fingers. "Here it is," he said.

Instantly Mac had stepped be-

hind him, one hand clutching out for Win's arm, the other around Alan's waist. Alan felt himself propelled through the doorway as if by a giant's shove; and the three of them stood inside, the girl looking rather bewildered.

"My Lord," she said to Mac, "you can move like an express train when you want to."

"Now listen," said the announcer. "When we get down there, be on your toes. Follow my lead. I know what I'm going to do. I'm— we're going to take over that ship."

"Jim, you're out of your head."

"No, I'm not. I know exactly what I'm going to do. We came here to smack these demons down, didn't we? Well, we will. Just be on your bloody toes, that's all."

Then they walked down the gentle slope until they had reached the shadow of the alien disk. They stopped a few feet from the watching outlanders. The captive Unquote writhed forward as far as she could on Alan's shoulder and spat at them.

They were a strange, a fantastic group, and yet they seemed to be human beings. Their bodies, much of which was unclothed, were built on the human scale; they averaged about six feet in height and their chest and limbs were developed to the same degree as a normally husky man's. Their foreheads were uniformly high. Their eyes varied in color, only one having irises of an unearthly hue, a kind of vivid vio-

let. Only in the arrangement of their features did they differ perceptibly from the men of Terra: the cheeks were broader, the noses flatter, the eyes more widely spaced, and the bone structure much less apparent. Somewhere Alan had seen a man, lately, whose vague memory reminded him of these fellows. Where . . . ?

Erin Grady!

WHEN the pilot had spread himself out, so to speak, against the back of the chair, his face had widened, the features had drawn sideways and perceptibly flattened, so that he had resembled these saucermen. Was this what he had meant when he said, "You can't touch us. What could you do anyway?" This holocaust, this ghastly obliterating of New York and Los Angeles and fifty more great cities?

Grady had been a spy for them, then; a watcher, landed perhaps from one of the disks on a dark night . . .

He shook himself. That's romantic hogwash, he said. Everyone on Project Star had a thorough checking-over, and his history from birth to the present was recorded in the files. That meant that Grady had been born here, in the United States.

Unless the keepers of the files were alien too, in which case a falsified record would be a simple matter to arrange.

But if he had been left here in comparatively recent times, say even four or five years ago, Alan went on, how did he learn our language, our backgrounds, our habits and customs and all the rest of it, so well? Are these creatures then so much farther advanced than we, that they can take on the perfect counterfeit of humanity in so short a time? He could not quite believe it. Grady had been too human.

Damn it all, *these* men looked too human!

He shrugged mentally, and began to examine their clothing. What there was of it was metallic, or of cloth that seemed metallic: each one wore a wide belt of silver filigree, reaching up to the ribs and down just past the groin; beneath this a material that resembled cloth of gold, very soft and fine, was wound about the loins. They all wore sandals, of varying colors, the straps of which appeared to be made of tinted copper or a like metal. The rest of their outfits were evidently according to the individual's own taste; some wore arm bands of glittering orange or yellow gold, some had circlets of shining gray argent bound about their hair, which in all cases was blond and cut about shoulder length. The over-all effect was splendidly barbaric, and about as far as Alan could imagine from the usual picture of visitors from space.

"They ought to have broadswords swinging at their thighs," he mur-

mured to Win. "Or at least be totting horn cups full of mead."

"Aren't they something!" she said, and then, "are these the devils who bombed all our world a few hours back? These big good-looking boys? I can't believe it!"

One of them bent over a square steel-like box and turned a dial; they heard Bill Thihling shout in the distance, "Hey, the wall's gone!" and saw him come running toward them.

"They're the ones," said Alan, and his mind, occupied till now with the romantic appearance of the invaders, became filled with hate.

INSTANTLY he felt something probing into his thoughts. It was, although he did not remember it, very like his first experience of hypnosis during the telecast. All he knew now, however, was that someone was leafing through his emotions and ideas as if they had been a large plainly-printed book. It made him furious. He might have done anything, shouted angrily or struck out at the nearest alien in an access of physical passion; but it was then that Jim McEldownie made his move.

"Okay," the lanky man roared, "strike now! Blast 'em! Get into the ship!" He lifted his rifle and fired it from the hip, and one of the outlanders spun round and fell, a great bloody cavern torn in his chest.

Alan did not question Jim's methods, though two minutes before he

would have; he blew the head off the nearest blond saucerman and shot over the falling body at another. Brave fired too, and Don Mariner; the others were caught by surprise and only stared wide-eyed.

An alien drew a silver tube from the back of his filigreed silver girdle and from its tiny muzzle a gout of scarlet flame flew at Alan. He felt nothing, thanked his luck that it had missed, and shot the man through the head. Then he was racing after McEldownie toward the crystal bubble's inclined plane.

Up they went into the disk, he and Mac in the lead, Unquote shrieking murder on his shoulder. Behind them he could hear the others pounding along, crying out questions or vague threats or battlecries.

The ship was much larger than those of Project Star, and more complex within; the ramp reached to a corridor with three doors. Mac was dashing for the farthest one; Alan threw his weight against the middle door. As it burst open his first glimpse was of four outlanders rising, open-mouthed, from chairs set before a bank of control panels.

Afterwards he could recall only the thing which flashed through his mind in that first instant of viewing them: that in the old West it had been proved time and again that one good man with a repeating rifle was better than four good men with revolvers. Alan proved it now, not against guns, but against the

small silver tubes that spat flame balls. The room was a shambles in eight seconds, and Alan turned for more conquest, to stumble over the body of a man in the corridor.

IT was Don Mariner, and he had no face. There was a raw bloody burn from ear to ear, from brow to throat. He had probably died very quickly. Alan straightened and gripped his gun's stock till the fingertips splayed out white and flat against it. Old Don, he said, old plump Don. Not so old, he said, probably no more than forty-two or -three, but you always thought of him affectionately as Old Don. Now who will there be to exclaim "By Judas!" when things get tough?

"Brave!" he bawled out. "Brave, are you safe?" He was hideously afraid for his great friend. When the copper face peered out of the third door, he was ill with relief.

"Had a little dust-up in here," said the Indian. "These boys wanted to brawl. My God," he said, coming out, "Don's had it."

"Yes, he's had it."

"He was a good man. Did we lose anyone else? I think the saucermen are all through."

Jim McEldownie joined them. "The big control room's up front there. We killed seven of 'em there. Rob took a leg burn and he'll walk with a limp for a while. No more casualties."

"Those tubes of theirs are frightful. If we hadn't taken them so

by surprise—”

“They were too careless,” said Brave. “Doesn’t make sense.”

Rob Pope hobbled out, one arm over Bill’s shoulders. “I think I know why,” he said. “When they got me down here, they searched through my mind. I could feel it plain as a physical touch. They found hate there, I’ll be bound, but it was for the bombing of the city, not a congenital hatred of outsiders. They found the same in Bill’s mind. It relaxed them and put them off guard.”

“How do you figure that?” asked Win.

“They were looking for an ingrained enmity toward themselves. It astonished them when they didn’t find it. They’re tremendously telepathic, and I’ll wager hypnotic too. I think they do much of their own communicating by thought waves; at least I didn’t hear them speak once.”

“When they discovered why I was angry, they were stunned. I mean they were shocked blue. You see, they made a mistake. They realized that as soon as they’d pried into my mind. They thought we were down here just waiting to kill them as soon as they landed, and naturally they had to cripple us before they dared do it. Then they found out their mistake. They had to kill someone, I’m not sure who, but the bombing of our cities could have been avoided had they known what we were like.”

“Wait a minute,” objected Brave. “Rob, how do you know all this?”

Pope looked surprised. “Why, they told me. They had just begun to explain it, hardly got more than a few ideas across, when you and Mac and Alan busted loose. If I’d known what you were planning I’d have stopped you. But now we have made a mistake as bad in its way as theirs.”

“They told you all this?” asked Win blankly.

“Yes. They talked in my mind. Not in English, but it came out that way. It was—pictures, I suppose is the nearest thing to it. Emotions and both abstract and concrete ideas can be transmitted by a good telepathist; and these boys were the best.” He shook his head. “It’s too bad. God knows where it will all end now.”

## CHAPTER XI

THEY carried the body of Don Mariner down the ramp and laid it on the rock-hard earth of the desolate bowl.

Mac, standing next to Alan, said in his ear, “Come aboard again. I want to show you something.”

Alan turned obediently, although why he should follow Mac’s commands—for it had been a command—he wasn’t sure; and Win screamed, a high hysterical keening that set Unquote to ululating too. The men all cried out. “What’s wrong? What is it?”

"Look at your head!" she said to Alan, pointing. Even in that somber moment he could not help laughing.

"How?" he said. "I'm not built that way."

"Oh, God," said Bill Thihling. "Alan, you took an awful blast in the ear. Why didn't you say something about it?"

"What are you talking about?" he said irritably. "I wasn't hit." He put a hand up to his right ear. Brave said, "Look out, boss, you'll hurt it. It's a bad one."

He fingered the ear. The tip and lobe, and part of the convolutions of the outer ear, felt like bits of steak which had been burnt in a searing flame; he looked at his fingers, amazed, and saw black flakes of skin and powdery, charcoal-like stuff. That must be the flesh, cooked and carbonized, almost incinerated in the astounding heat of the little fireball. "They did hit me," he said stupidly, staring at his fingers. "I never felt it."

Brave, examining the ear without touching it, said, "You'll lose most of that ear, son. It's—you never felt it?"

"I can't feel it now. I mean, I have sensation in it, I can feel my fingers when they touch it, but it doesn't hurt."

Then, just as comprehension of what he was saying began to dawn on him, he heard Mac say again, very urgently, "Get aboard the ship. Jump!" And he jumped.

He hared it up the ramp, Unquote writhing on his shoulder, and leaped in through the first door he came to; Mac yelled, "No, this one!" It was the front control room, the largest of the three; he was out and into it in a flash, to find Mac already sitting in a chair before the central panels. "Sit down there," snapped the lanky man, indicating the next seat. Alan did, half-wondering why, half-knowing that he must. The great viewplates above the controls, on which was mirrored the earth and sky on every side of the disk, blinked on; Mac cursed angrily.

"Why couldn't you have followed me at once? Now the fools have got in." He was out of the chair and bolting the door of the room before Alan could open his mouth. Then he was back, touching levers and buttons, adjusting dials. One of the viewplates showed the crystal bubble closing; then another came on and they could see the center room: Brave and Win and the others were there, talking earnestly, although their voices could not be heard. Suddenly the door to that room swung shut. Brave hurled his tremendous bulk at it, but it was shut fast. Mac chuckled.

"Okay, you damned impetuous idiots. Sit down if you don't want to be smeared all over the floor." Evidently they could hear him. After a moment's argument they took seats. Mac pushed over a long lever, like the joystick of a monoplane, and with a very slight rocking mo-

tion the saucer rose into the air.

MAC glanced at Alan. "Buckle that strap around your chest, pal. You'll need it for the turns."

"How in the name of everything sane did you learn to operate a disk, Jim?" he asked. Just then he was less surprised at the man's cavalier treatment of his friends than at the enormity of this, that McElownie could fly an alien disk.

"Nothing to it," said the other. "I was a pilot originally." He looked over again. "*That was five hundred years ago*," he said, almost casually. "Buckle the strap, hang it."

Alan did so in a daze. He knew that he was not in complete control of himself, and yet he did not know why. There were a hundred questions rocketing in his mind and they confused him so that obedience to McElownie's commands came automatically. He wondered if he were under hypnotic influence again; but he did not feel that he was.

"Oh, you are, chum," said Mac without looking at him. "Not altogether, you understand; Brave's counter-hypnosis played hell with my plans for you. Cuss the big so-and-so. I should have killed him when he moved out of the lamps and out of any possible control. But I wanted him too. I liked him."

"Who are you?" breathed Alan . . .

The cold voice spoke in his mind, shattering his questions before they were asked, shaking what was left

of his confidence, forcing him to quail mentally and physically.

*Oh, stubborn slave, didn't you know? Didn't you know?*

*God, God, perhaps I did.*

*I am you and you are me . . .*

McElownie laughed. It was not a cold laugh, not sinister or dramatic. It was a perfectly healthy expression of mirth. "Alan, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry, and you won't ever believe that, but it's true. It surprises me. Living among you for all these years has mellowed ol' Mac, I guess. I find myself thinking of you as friends, when I used to regard you as dogs: faithful without knowing it, helpful, indispensable in many cases, but hardly more than good dogs." He paused a moment, then went on. "I'm your voice, of course. There's no trick to it when you know how. A matter of hypnosis plus the lights plus psychology, plus whatever the power in us is that makes our minds different from yours. I'm the voice. I wasn't going to admit it, but my plans have changed for you."

HE banked the disk around over desolate Manhattan and said, "Takes a while to get the reflexes working again. I haven't sat behind the controls since we left home. Your five-times-great grandfather wasn't a twinkle in his old man's eye when we left home."

Alan could not speak. He was remembering things he had not been able to remember, the voice and

what it had told him, the night that it called him from bed to come to the terrible lamps, and—

"Yes, it was me, it was all me, Alan. I was the voice in your head at the telecast, I called you in the night; I worked the lights in the shed on Project Star. There are plenty of us out there, but I wanted you for my own personal side-kick. You're smart and a good scientist, and you'll make a good lieutenant when we go home." The words made no sense and yet Alan seemed to catch a glimmering of the understanding that was to come.

He said, "I guess I ought to exclaim, 'You're mad!' but I know you're not. You can pilot this thing and you can move faster than a cheetah, and everything's gone mad this past week and I want to know why. Don't lie to me, Mac. For the love of God, don't lie to me. One more wrong theory implanted in my skull and I'll blow my stack for good."

"I won't lie. I'm all through lying, to you at any rate. The others can't hear me at the moment, but I suppose I may as well tune them in too." His homely face, with its great prow of a nose and the half-shut green eyes, looked a little sad. "I'm afraid they're all going to die, Alan. Except Win, that is. You see, the speeds at which I'm going to fly this disk will kill a human being. On the turns, if I get into dogfights, the 'G' forces will be terrific. You and

Win can stand 'em, because you've been conditioned. Brave and Rob and Bill will be smashed to jelly under the 'G' impact. I'm sorry. I like Brave and I admire Rob's intelligence. I'd like to save them. But they got aboard because you were slow, and now they're done for. I can't land and put 'em out. Time is precious. I have to maneuver this ship until I know I can do stunts with her like the ones I did at home. A long time ago, Alan." He grinned ruefully. "A long time even to me."

"What do you mean, I was slow getting aboard?" Alan fastened on this small facet of the affair, frightened of finding out too much of the truth at once.

"Man, you can move as fast as I if you try. You've had three long treatments under the lamps. Your energies are stepped up, if you learn to use them correctly, your reflexes are as fast as those of the cat on your shoulder, and you're almost deathless compared to your friends. Might as well start there," he mused. "They can hear us in the other room." On the viewplate, Win and Brave nodded. Jim clicked shut a switch. "Now they can see us. Okay, you four, I'm going to do some explaining. I can hear you now, but if you start to interrupt I'll switch you off."

Brave said, "Alan, are you all right?"

"He's ginger-peachy," said Mac. "In fact he'll be all right two hun-

dred years from now.

"There's no use in explaining the rays to you; it would take hours and you would scarcely grasp the principle even then. I'll tell you what they do. They lengthen your life span—my own is about a thousand years, but Alan's will be nearer four hundred, for I caught him late. Generations of my ancestors were exposed to them, too; it affects the genes eventually and we're born long-lived. They quicken your reflexes through a process of strengthening the nerves and certain cells of the brain. They also affect the portions of the brain which send and receive telepathic stimuli. After one treatment it's easy to control a man over a long distance.

"The effect of the rays on the muscles is unique. They become almost rubbery, not loose, you understand, but capable of stretching and flexing in directions that look uncanny to a non-initiate. That's how poor Grady escaped being sliced down the middle when he rammed up his ship. He drew all his muscles to the sides and flattened out like a plaster on the chair. You couldn't do that; your skeletons are thicker and more immovable than ours. I'd show you how I can ooze out sideways and make my ribs about as level as a picket fence—but I'm afraid you wouldn't like the sight. It must be pretty gruesome to an Earthman."

"Were the rays in the TV lights?" asked Bill Thihling.

"That's right. I've caught plenty of fish that way, including President Blose of the U.S. of A. and nine-tenths of his cabinet. A lot of your scientists have become unwitting puppets through being seen on *Worlds of Portent*. Alan got two treatments there and one on Project Star. Win got her first in the gym of the colony and two more in that shed." He smiled guilelessly. "You were right about her, of course, in a way I mean; for she can't feel pain. I caught her mind just before I pinched her—and very pleasant it was, too, my dear, even if I meant it impersonally—and told her to simulate pain. She was under my control every second of that time. When she left, I pretended to go to sleep, and called her back. I had a feeling I'd need her around. Glad I did. She and Alan are all the fighting forces I have at the moment."

ALAN brushed over much of what he wanted to know, to ask, "Can you feel pain, Mac?"

"Yes, I can. A man can't give up pain. It's too valuable. We put an added ingredient into the rays we used on you people of Terra, to eliminate pain."

"Why?"

"I'll get to that. The welder, of course, was a man who had been treated. One of our boys got rid of him in a vat of molten metal. Couldn't have an unfinished experiment walking around loose. He slip-

ped up when he failed to simulate pain. Sometimes we get 'em like that, too dumb to do the right things even under complete hypnosis. Win was a different case. She didn't know she'd been burnt by that cigarette. If she'd seen it, she'd have yipped. She was conditioned to do it, even to think she felt pain. If you'd known you'd been grazed by that fireball, Alan, you'd not only have roared, you'd have *thought* you felt it."

"Why don't I think so now?"

"It's too late for verisimilitude. Your subconscious knows that. It shrugs its teensy-weensy shoulders and forgets it."

"Who shot at Alan after the welder incident?" asked Brave. His face was cold and malignant.

"One of Getty's men."

"Doc Pomosity?"

"That's right. Getty's not fully under control. His unconscious and natural wish not to kill Alan made him send a man out with an automatic, rather than a grenade pistol. But he was conditioned enough to feel that Alan was dangerous to us and he at least made a stab at assassination. Then before he could do it again, we got to him and told him we were going to 'convert' you."

All this while he had been twisting and turning the disk, making practice runs and dives; the control rooms, floated within the hull and leveling off no matter what direction the great saucer took, vibrat-

ed slightly and continuously. It was almost like being in the hold of a sailing ship.

Rob said, "I suppose the curious construction of your skeletons and muscular development helps you stand the motion and the acceleration of the disks?"

"That's right. Alan and Win can stand it too, especially since they feel no pain of any sort. But we haven't started going fast yet—I haven't put it above five hundred. When we hit four thousand—that's m.p.h.—I'm afraid you'll die, you three." Mac scowled unhappily. "I hope you realize I don't want to kill you? In the first place, I'd like to have you on my side, because we both have a score to settle with the hounds who bombed your cities. I would have slain Mariner out of hand, slain him as he slew poor Grady when he had him helpless in that chair, but luckily he got his in the fight. I haven't any wish to kill off my potential army, but the speed of an air battle will do it. And I'm going to be in some fights before long."

Alan, strapped to his chair, was leaning over toward Mac as far as he could. Now he said, "By heaven, you haven't any pores in your skin!"

"I was afraid you'd notice that before. I had a fantastic yarn cooked up to explain it. That's right, pal; Grady and me, and all the rest of us, haven't any sweat glands or pores or tear ducts. There

are other little differences too, but they don't cut any ice. The differences notwithstanding, we are human. Not strictly Earthtype human; I suppose, but human nonetheless." He brooded over his controls, as the disk roared silently through the sky. "I like you all, too, dammit. I don't want to kill you. I think I'll chance another ten minutes and set you down.

"I must be getting soft in my middle age," he added with a wry smile. "Chancing the loss of a world for three idiot kids. Oh, well. What the hell. A gallant gesture will maybe pay off in the long run."

THERE were several minor points that nagged at Alan; he wanted them out of the way before someone asked the one big question of McEldownie. "Why didn't Grady control my mind when we tied him up? Why couldn't he save himself?"

"Erin Grady was a weak link. We have 'em in our chain, you know. We're not supermen. He was weak at hypnosis and he couldn't bear pain. I think he was a throwback to the days when we were altogether Earth-style humanity. He called to me, though, and I shot back; but I came just too late. That fool Mariner!" With a savage twist he angled the disk toward earth. Then he laughed. "I've wanted to compliment you on your mutant theory, Alan. It was ingenious as the devil and it accounted for ev-

erything you'd seen up to that time. If we could regenerate parts, the loss of pain wouldn't matter, and we could take the treatment we're giving you and lose pain and be thankful. But 'tain't so. We're not supermen. It's only our robots—pardon me, our earthly henchmen—who are immune to pain. Coming in contact with both kinds of 'aliens' must have confused the very living dickens out of you."

"Hold on," said Alan. "I just thought of something. If I'm immune to pain, why did I feel it so excruciatingly when Brave hit me, when he wanted to put me under hypnosis? Tell me that was all in my mind . . . !"

"It wasn't. You didn't get the pain-destroying rays till your third treatment, on last night's telecast."

"Oh. That's it." He patted Unquote on the head; she was getting restless. Then it became obvious why. "Damn," said Alan, "now I'll have to have this suit cleaned. Puss, couldn't you have waited a little longer?"

Bill asked, "What about the saucers? I mean, they suddenly turned out to be better than anyone suspected. Why?"

McEldownie looked grim. "Some saucers had been sighted that we knew weren't ours. We had a few left from the days when we first came to Earth, in the late 1700s; we used to fly 'em occasionally to keep our hands in. But these weren't ours. So we knew we had to

speed things up. Till then we'd been content to go along, giving your scientists an unobtrusive push now and then, so they'd believe they had done it all; our time schedule called for intergalactic-space disks about 1984. Well, we knew when the others were seen that we didn't have all the time in the world, as we'd thought. So we had to jump in feet first, take a lot of men under our controlling wing, start making robots —there I go again, that's a bad word for them—making unkillable soldiers of others, and substitute our own advanced designs for those in use at that time. We were too late; the damned enemy came down too fast. But now that I've got one of theirs—and a beauty it is, too—thanks to your help, I have a fighting chance."

"Who are the enemy?" It was Win, breathless, leaning forward, her breast rising and falling rapidly with the emotion and wonder of this thing. "Who are you going to fight?"

Mac looked at her in the view-plate. "The men from my planet," he said quietly. "The men who cast us out, as if we'd been the fallen angels of Lucifer in your myth, chucked us out of our own world and sent us to wander in the void."

HE made the ship do a quick turn, and Alan saw Brave and Rob and Bill suck in their bellies and grimace. Mac said, "They

half-crippled me then, damn them, and this is the first time I've flown since I left home. Some of the others have managed to stay a little more in practice. But by God, I'm still the best hotshot pilot my people ever produced, and I'm going to prove it today." He glanced up at the viewplate. "I'm going to let you out, you three. I want Alan and Win; they're my people now, and in a fight they can be a terrific help, for they're almost impossible to kill. I'll land now, and you can go. I oughtn't to do it. But curse you, Injun, I like you." He shot the disk toward the earth from a height of seven miles.

Brave said, "We won't get out."

"Don't be silly. You'll die under the 'G' load when I really get going."

"Then we'll die. I won't leave Alan with you, nor Win either. You will let us all out, or kill us."

"You bloody village idiot. What good will it do you to die?"

"I can't leave Alan. I saw him through Argentina and I'll see him through this hell you've put him into. Besides, someone's got to clean and bandage that ear, or he'll lose the whole thing. It's a bad wound."

"Not to him it's not. He doesn't feel it. The rays eliminate all danger of infection, disease—he can't even catch a common cold. His ear will be okay."

"Ear, schmear," said Rob Pope. "I stick by my friends too. Maybe—

all I can do is die like a squashed mouse, but I *can* do that. We don't scuttle for cover, alien."

"Likewise," said Bill Thihling laconically.

"Beastly blasted blue-bottomed baboons of knotheaded numbskulls!" roared McEldownie. "Do you want me to kill you, then?"

"I want you to let us all go; but if you won't, then Alan's better dead than living under your influence, like a marionette."

"He won't die. I tell you! No matter what happens to you, he'll go on living. He'll be my man."

"I don't think so," said Brave calmly. "I don't care what sort of all-powerful rays you put him under, or how you've caught the reins of his mind. If you kill me, Alan is sooner or later going to kill you. Live with that, McEldownie, or whatever your right name is. I don't for a minute believe that you can take as good a man as Alan and murder his best friend before his eyes and have him lick your boots. Kill me and you're done, Mac."

"Damn you, Lo! You're wrong, and you know it." He snarled at the viewplate. "You absolutely won't get out of the disk if I land it?"

"No."

"Then die, you fool," said Mac, the words half-strangled in his throat; and he sent the ship rocketing through space like a meteor.

ALAN had felt Mac's mind leave his when Brave started to ar-

gue. He had concentrated furiously then on what he could do to overpower the alien. Very little of worth had occurred to him; but as a last resort he had determined on quick physical violence. If he could move as fast as Mac said he could, there was a chance.

Now, as the disk shot forward, he sensed Mac reaching out to touch his brain again, and with all his will he thought of other things, anything, anything except what he meant to do. He stared at the viewplate that showed the central room. He could feel almost no sensation of motion, and Win seemed quite all right. But the three men were curled in their chairs, gasping, even the mighty Indian writhing under horrible, painful pressure.

"For the love of God, Mac!" cried Alan.

And McEldownie slowed the ship. He turned a sickened, saddened countenance to Alan. "I can't do it," he said a little pitifully. "I can't kill that big red devil. I like him too well. I think he knew that when he made his proposition. I don't care how much it delays me, I've got to land him. Hear that, Lo?" he said to the viewer. "I'm going to do it. I'll put your whole precious gang out on land, and find some of my own boys. Project Star will be the place, if I can get there without interference. I can load up my crew and a few of the painless gentry and it'll make a better

army than this would have been. But dammit, I did want my protege Alan with me."

"Say your dog, rather," suggested Alan bitterly.

"All right. Didn't you ever love a dog?"

"Yes."

"It's the same with me. I can't help feeling your race is inferior, but I can still be good and sorry to see you die, I can still feel affection for you."

"And that makes up for what you have been doing to him and the others?" asked Bill weakly.

"Oh, hell!" Mac bit his lip. "You are an impossible breed, you Earthlings."

Alan felt his mind withdraw again as he angled the disk around toward the west. In that instant, shoving aside the already unbuckled strap from his chest, and drawing the long hunting knife from its sheath at his side, he pounced out of his chair full upon the alien. Mac's green eyes flew open as Alan, his movements blurred by his incredible quickness caught the outlander's chin and dragged it back and with the other hand pressed the edge of the keen knife against the brown throat. Then, as he collected his startled thoughts, Alan said briskly, "Don't do it, Mac. Don't even think about touching my brain, because it's clear as a bell right now, and the first feeling I have of your meddling with it, I'm going to drag this knife through your windpipe.

You can't control me without at least half a second's preparation, and with the reflexes you've given me, that's enough." He glanced up at the viewer. "Brave, Rob, don't either of you try to tell me anything telepathically. I know the different sensations I get when I'm being paged or controlled, and the first whimper of one of 'em sends this blade into Mac's neck."

NO one spoke for a moment.

Then Mac said, "If you knew how ridiculous you look, standing there with that whopping carver and with that sick cat on your shoulder, I really believe you'd give this business up and bust out laughing."

"Don't count on it," said Alan levelly. "I'll tell you what, Mac. You said you were going to let us all go. Maybe you were. But I don't trust you worth an inflated nickel. You'd have found a way to get Win and me back. Besides that, we only have your side of the story, and about a tenth of it, at that. I want to meet some of these birds that bombed our cities. They told Rob, before you had me murder them, that they had made a mistake. They had to kill someone but they didn't mean to kill us. That someone was obviously you. I want to know why. If I let you and this saucer get out of my hands, and then find that the bombers are in the right in whatever quarrel they have with you, I'll be sorry the rest of my life. So you're going to take

us to 'em, Mac. We're going to get the whole story."

McEldownie laughed. It was a completely mirthless noise. "Kiwanawatiwa," he said to Brave, "I have you to thank for this mutiny, you and those hypnosis gimmicks of yours."

"No, not altogether," said Alan. The knife pressed in a little and the tall man winced. "It was your admission that you were my voice," My beloved voice in the depths of space, he thought, almost ruefully. It was fearful but I loved it. "If you hadn't wanted to brag, you might have kept control of me."

"I wasn't bragging. I wanted you as an ally and friend, rather than a puppet."

"Robot is the word. You used it a couple of times."

"Not for you, damn it. I liked you as a fellow human being."

Something flicked at Alan's mind with feathery tentacles; the knife drew blood and the feathery searching stopped. "That hurts," objected Mac.

"It'll hurt worse. Take us to the nearest disk you know of."

"How would I know of any?"

"You can find them. Do it."

"Don't push me too far," said the other icily. "Remember I'm infinitely stronger than you."

"But very susceptible to a sliced-up jugular."

"I won't wreck five hundred years of plans, even for you!"

"Not for me," said Alan easily.

"For the sake of your throat, Mac old boy."

Mac sighed, and turned the ship gently, for fear of the deadly blade in Alan's remorseless hand, and sent it rocking over the hills inland.

"I'm a weak link," he said bitterly. "A weak link like poor old Grady. I didn't know I'd be so afraid to die."

## CHAPTER XII

THEY landed gently beside the two great silver disks, and Mac sat back and said, "Well," proudly, for it was his first landing in half a millennium. "Now what, Jack the Ripper?"

"Now we go out and talk to them. First we let the gang out of the middle room; though."

Mac flipped a switch. "They can open the door now."

Brave and the others came to meet them in the corridor. They all had their rifles at the ready. "Put up the knife, Alan," said Rob Pope. "He's under control pretty well, I'd say. One phony move or thought and he's done."

Mac looked at them all. "I liked you," he said sadly. "I suppose I'll have to kill you eventually, but I did like you." Then they marched him down the ramp to the ground.

Alan and Win and Rob were aware at once of the amazement that ran through the alien forces like a chinook wind among pines. Alan could catch the thoughts plainly: *It is he, it is the leader!*

"Holy cats," he said, and Unquote stirred feebly but angrily on his shoulder. "Mac, are you the chief of your bunch?"

"Yes. Oh, laddie, I'm a prize catch. They'll give you the Iron Cross for me. Or the Lead Casket."

The outlanders, duplicates in form and clothing of the men slain by Alan and the others, clustered around them. Alan wondered if there were hatred in his brain to be found by these fellows. He did not actually know himself whether or not he hated them for their bombing. The destruction of New York had been such a gargantuan thing, such an incredibly huge blow, that the solution of smaller problems seemed to have driven it out of his thoughts entirely; perhaps it was a trick of his subconscious, to prevent his going mad with horror.

He could hear them—if "hear" was the verb—talking mentally together. There was no language involved, evidently, for the thoughts were surely as plain to him as to the aliens themselves. "It's like listening in on an oldfashioned party line," he told Win.

"Isn't it! I mean," she added hastily, "I'm not old enough to remember, but it must be."

Alan grinned. "As I catch it, they're congratulating each other on capturing Mac. And by glory, they're thanking us!"

"They just unfolded my mind like a road map," said Rob, "so they

know about all that we know. What stupendous capacities for absorption their brains must have! I get the feeling that they just glance through a kind of card index that's in the back room of my skull, and then they know how I feel about them, and about chess and women, and what I had for supper last night."

"It's not that miraculous," said McEldownie, on whose wrists two of the aliens in filigreed harness had placed brass manacles connected by a long chain. "They—and I—touch the centers of emotion, and judge from them what sort of person you are. Just now they read the records of how you got the disk, and how you captured me; and they tried to find out how you reacted to the bombing of New York, but your emotion there was too obscure."

"I obscured it myself. I was ashamed of it. Because," said Rob, wrinkling up his forehead, "although I'm shaken when I think of it, and feel so sorry that *sorry* is a mild-word, still I can't find any hatred for your brothers here. I honestly think it was a mistake on their part; and it must have been based on evidence, so that evidence was falsified; and only you and your crew could have done that. Ergo, I don't hate them. I hate you, Mac."

"You're all wrong."

"I'll find out before I do anything about it."

HALF a dozen of the bare-chested blond fellows came to stand before them. Again, there was no evidence of weapons—but whereas the first group had been careless after finding no basic hatred in Rob and Bill, this contingent had carefully studied the intent and the mental content of each of them. Probably, thought Alan, it was because they had brought McElownie, who had been instantly recognized.

"That's right," said Mac in answer to his thought. "That first bunch were strangers to me. See the tall bloke with the argent headband? That's my uncle, my mother's brother. Half of this lot knew me at home."

"Mac," said Win, "where *is* your home?"

"Erin Grady told you the truth. We come from the ninth planet of a sun unknown to you."

"And why did you come?"

"That's a long yarn—and my uncle says he has something to tell you." Mac shut his mouth. Tall, bony, homely, dressed in ordinary American clothes, his beak of a nose and the half-lidded green eyes so familiar to them all, Alan and the others felt a pang at seeing him silent and crestfallen among the fantastically clad outlanders. He was one of them, but he was also McElownie, the TV announcer, the fellow who made bad puns and got drunk and ate enormously and suffered with them when New York died. Even Rob Pope, surer than

the rest that Mac was at the bottom of all the hell unleashed that day, scowled and gave him a sorry grin.

"Maybe I'm planting the thought in your minds," Mac said cynically. None of them had spoken.

"I'd know if you were, I think," said Rob. "No, it's natural. You were a good egg."

"And as good eggs go, I went bad." He shrugged. "I think now that I didn't need to let you capture me for them. I might have killed Alan on the spot by touching a single button. Damn you all," he said without emotion, "I either loved you too well, or I was sick of running and being a rebel."

"A rebel against what?" asked Bill Thihling.

"Stuffiness and authority. I've got to shut up." He hung his head. He looked very tired and rather older than he had before this hour.

Then the leader of the aliens spoke to them. The message came in the curious wordless manner, and each of them put words to it in his own mind. To Alan it came like this:

"We are profoundly shocked at our hasty action of this morning. We have done you incomparable injury where a little more investigation would have shown us you were not inimical, not working against us, not bad at all as men go. Our only excuse is that we were direly pressed for time."

"We investigated certain sections of your planet where activities

showed us some of the rebels from our world were at work; they were building ships and weapons to return to us, to attack us. We found at these places, some cities and some isolated deserts, some small towns and some government projects, that our rebels had taken control of your people, making them invulnerable with the ray which is known to us, making them long-lived and incapable of pain and with quickened reflexes and swifter bodies than before. To investigate this we should have had weeks. We gave ourselves less than a day. For we knew that our ships would have been sighted and the rebels would be speeding their plans. So we found many robot humans, many scientists working with our exiled people, and we thought that in all these places there must be millions of potential foemen."

THE message was charged with emotion; it was impossible to believe that the man was lying. Indeed, thought Alan, there was no reason why he should lie. If he could wipe out New York with one small golden egg, he had no need to make allies of a few puny humans.

"Again, our sole excuse is the lack of time. We did find many places where only a portion of those checked were under rebel control. Those places we did not bomb, trusting that if we struck the large cities and the projects where disk

manufacture was under way, we could mop up the others with ground fighting."

I wonder if Project Star is gone, thought Alan.

"I wonder," echoed Win aloud. Then they turned to each other, astounded. "Darling," she said after a second, "that's the one thing I like about this hardening, pain-removing process—now we can talk to each other without words!"

"Think what we can do with our mouths while we're talking," he grinned.

The leader went on. "I may interject here that we took over control of your artificial satellite some days ago. We did not kill the men therein, who were not enemies, but control them by simple hypnosis. They will of course be freed of this as soon as our job is done and a peace settled on between our worlds."

Brave looked up at the sky. Albertus, of course, could not be seen with the naked eye, but he said, "I know a couple of the lads that run that space station. Good boys. I'd been afraid they were dead. I knew they wouldn't have let us be smeared like this if they'd been able to prevent it."

"Only one city we bombed that we had not personally checked on; that is the large one over there," and he gestured toward Manhattan. "We could not send our men on the ground into that place; the entranceways are too complex, the

place is too big, it would have taken too long; and we could scarcely fly over and drop spies. After earnest consultation we decided to bomb it. Being the largest concentration of civilized people in your world, being so close to the major rebel project, we felt—we *knew*—that it was full of enemies. Our stupidly certain assumption was wrong. We can never make reparation for that mistake, we cannot begin to make amends to you. Your only help will be the knowledge that we will live with the memory of that mistake the rest of our lives; and they are long, long lives.

"We are men of good will. We beg you to believe this. We have outlawed war and our planet lives at peace, prosperous peace. Now we have committed an intolerable crime against a brother race. We are hurt, in our way, as much as you have been hurt."

**B**RAVE had taken Alan's hand in his own and was squeezing it hard; the scientist thought suddenly that if he were not impervious to pain, his hand would be aching like fury. Brave said, "Son, I need help," quite simply and humbly.

"What is it, Brave?"

"Alan, these people are good. They look like barbarians, they ride in twenty-second century vehicles, and they plaster our greatest cities into the earth. But they're good. He isn't lying."

"What's the problem, Brave?"

"I hate them," the Indian said fiercely. "I'd like to have them all here," he let go Alan's hand and jabbed a great forefinger at his palm. "I'd smash 'em like lice: I don't want to feel that way. It's primitive. But strip me of the veneer I've lost these last hours, and I'm primitive to the core. I'm simple and single-minded. I hate people who do me harm. I won't go berserk and start in on these gentry, but by heaven, by the Great Spirit, I'd like to wipe them all out—slaughter them all! I want to sacrifice them to the ghosts of our dead cities."

Alan said slowly, "And you don't want to feel that way. Because they're good, you want to forgive them their mistake. My God, Brave," he cried, "how can we ever forgive them? We can understand them, but none of us will ever truly forgive and forget. Do you think because you feel that way that you are reverting to savagery? Then we're every one of us on the face of the earth pure howling savages!"

Brave searched his face. He nodded. "I see. I thought it was just me. I guess I thought you would be shooting them up if you felt that way too. Sorry, khedive. Heap sorry make-um dust-up over nothin'."

Alan smiled grimly.

Rob said, "If we only knew a little more of the basic story, hang it! They haven't mentioned where they came from, why they exiled Mac's

boys or why they chased after them, anything about themselves except that they made a mistake. Holy old boot, we know that."

The leader put in urgently: "I sense many questions which I would happily answer if I had the time. But I have just received word that our forces are massing to attack the disk project to the east of that large city. I must therefore leave you until the job is done."

"They're attacking Project Star!" said Win sharply. "Good Lord, Alan, we've got a hundred friends there!"

"Yes, and just as innocent people as those who died in Manhattan. They can't do it." He stepped forward—it was significant that not one alien tried to stop him—and laid a hand on the leader's bare, brawny arm. The flesh was almost normal . . . but not quite. Alan recalled Brave's suggestion of the feel of a rubber product. The arm was hairless and without pores, cool to the touch. He looked up into the leader's face. It was a good face, though the widened features gave it a somewhat aboriginal cast. It was a patriarchal face, more that of the ruler of a tribe than of the leader of a fleet of space disks who must also be an advanced scientist. The long yellow hair was turning slightly gray over the temples.

The man smiled. Yes, he said to Alan without words, I am over nine hundred years old.

"He comes from Shangri-la," said

Bill Thihling. "He's the High Lama. Can't kid me."

Among his captors, the man-cled McElownie threw back his head and laughed. "That's what we needed," he said, "a good feeble jest. This meeting was getting dull as hell."

Alan ignored them. He tried to pierce into the leader's brain with his eyes, he thought fiercely and as hard as he ever had.

After three minutes the leader nodded. Alan turned to Brave. "Boy, we're going with them. We're going to lead the attack on Project Star."

"If you've got something up your sleeve—" began Rob.

"Nothing he doesn't know of. You think I'm able to keep my thoughts to myself? But we can say, or try to say, a lot of our people. Win stays here, of course. So does Rob, who has a bad leg." The leader started, gestured to another outlander, who opened one of the numerous cases on the ground and took out bandages and salves in tins, with which he began to repair the burn on Pope's leg. "Bill," said Alan, "you want to come?"

"Try and dissuade me!"

"Cheers, then, gal," said Alan lightly, and kissed Win. He turned and went into the great disk via the bubble's ramp. Brave and Bill followed him. The leader and five of the others went up, leaving half a dozen with McElownie and Win and Rob. Then Alan reappeared,

looking sheepish, came down and handed a weary cat to the girl. "I've been wearing her on my shoulder for so long she thought she was growing there." He patted Unquote (who raked up the energy to spit at him) and disappeared once more. The disk rose silently into the air.

ALAN learned now that the aliens had a spoken tongue; for they began to chatter to each other, the sentences brief, the words evidently long and complex. It sounded a little like Latin, a little like Greek; but no words were even faintly familiar.

"What's your plan, Alan?" asked Brave.

"Not a very complex one, I'm afraid. We're to be allowed to go in first, the disk having flown low to avoid being sighted, and been landed behind the hill that overlooks our house. We're to gain entrance naturally, if possible, or sneak in if the place is too heavily fortified and suspicious. I think we can walk right in. I'm patently a 'robot' and you two can be under my charge. Then we have an hour to contact everyone we can. We tell the fellows who are okay to collect in the chem lab. We try to persuade the robots to congregate in the welding room, where they can be captured easily and without bloodshed. But if we can't tell the difference between robots and aliens, then we pass along quick. We have to step high and fast, lads. And we can't

separate to do the job, since you two can't check over the thoughts of the people we meet."

He stood up. "I'm going to wander around and get to know the boys. We'll be fighting on their side soon."

"I hope it's the right side."

"I think it is."

He walked over to the nearest group of aliens, who greeted him courteously. He found that when they spoke aloud he could not read their thoughts; but when they sensed that he believed them to be talking about him or about secrets they had from him, they at once went mute and directed their thought conversation to his brain cells. He sat down and began to ask questions. He found that he was able to do so now without strain.

"Yes," one of them told him, "your powers develop rapidly after the third exposure to the rays. They come so gradually that you are hardly aware of them. It's a rapid gradualness, though."

Alan recalled that it was in the captured disk that he first felt the tremendous, awakened power of his mind to read and feel the reciprocation of other minds. He nodded. They went on talking.

AT three-thirty p.m. of the day New York died, the three men walked up to the gate of Project Star. They carried their heavy rifles openly, and looked belligerent. It would have been hard to appear

otherwise.

They were challenged by a soldier, who fronted a squad of men with flamers and grenade pistols. Before Alan could answer, the soldier said, "Oh, it's Dr. Rackham. Pass in, sir. Where'd you come from?"

"Manhattan."

"Cripes! you're lucky to be here." It was the same soldier who had passed him on the night of his treatment in the shed. He went in to the colony, Brave and Bill Thihling at his heels.

At four-twenty-eight p.m. the three of them walked up close to the same gate. There were nine soldiers on duty. Beyond the fence were the ack-ack guns, radar detectors, and force field generators, manned by a number of other soldiers.

The three put their rifles down on the ground. Then they solemnly began to dance around in a little circle, unbuttoning their coats as they did so. The squad stared, moved uneasily a little closer, looked at their leader for guidance. He shrugged. He was a robotized fellow who had been made a particular pet by one of the aliens; he knew a great deal about the scheme of things in the colony—consciously, rather than unconsciously as most of them did—and was trusted above most of his fellows. He was not especially bright.

"They ain't breaking any rules," he said. "You never know what the hell a scientist is gonna do."

Brave and Alan and Bill had now

divested themselves of their shirts and were taking off their undershirts. They were still dancing their lilting small cakewalk.

"Nuts," said the soldier. "They're nuts. Musta caught some radiation from that buster." All the men on the ring of huge equipment beyond the fence were watching them too. It was amusing to see a really mad scientist, and three were delightful. They whooped and cheered and laughed.

Then the saucermen came over the hill.

It was as though they erupted from the ground, even to Alan and his henchmen who had been watching for them. And what a sight it was! Barbarians in every physical trait, from face to naked chest to ornate girdle and gold loincloth, armed with tiny tubes that hurled fireballs and with thin blowpipes that shot numbing darts over incredible distances, they might have been warriors from a forgotten land in a long-forgotten time. And they came silently, so that they seemed to approach through the noiseless depths of a dream. But the shriek of a soldier falling from a gun platform, his face in flames, was not out of a dream, but a hideous nightmare.

THE three men pounced on their rifles, threw them up and were firing methodically even before they had regained the erect position. Alan and Brave, crack shots who had been used to practice every Sunday

morning on the military range, shot for the heads; Bill, a less certain marksman, tried for the chests. The brain and heart were the only sure targets when you fought a man who could feel no pain and could keep going with half of his body shot away.

For a brief time it seemed to the soldiers that the scientists were shooting aliens; then the leader turned and saw where the muzzles pointed.

"Get 'em!" he bellowed, and sprayed a charge from a grenade pistol that went wide of its mark but fanned Bill's cheek with tiny scraps of hot breeze. Next instant he was down, kicking from Bill's slug, and the guards of the gate were finished.

The vanguard of the outlanders swept in and across the grounds. They had concentrated on this single gate, as the others had too open approaches for safety. There were men from sixteen saucers, over four hundred of them, and they ran like deer, like cheetahs after deer, like winds after cheetahs. Mutely, with a kind of ferocious impersonality, they descended on the colony.

Men came running out with machine guns and feverishly began to load them. They were picked off by rifle bullets, by paralyzing ray tubes, and relays came and were picked off and more came. One gun stuttered into action momentarily, and the crew went twisting up in the air, their gun blown apart, their

bodies rent by a weapon that even Alan had not known of. He spotted it finally, a blunderbuss-shaped thing of silver with a flaring mouth, fired like a bazooka: Another machine gun blew up.

Among the buildings there was hand-to-hand combat, automatics against fire tubes, outlander against rebel outlander in wrestling, heaving confusion. All the men from the stranger planet fought without speaking; the robots shouted, like normal men in a battle. Brave was bawling war whoops and Alan was cursing steadily, as he always did under fire. Bill Thihling had got himself lost somewhere.

The leader of Alan's saucer went by, blond hair streaming, blood dripping down the brown chest. Alan caught a thought: *thanks*. He knew, from touching Alan's mind in passing, that many of the nonrobot men and women were gathered in safety, and even a number of the alien-controlled puppets had been herded into the welding room and locked in, obedient to Alan's hypnotic order.

THE Indian and Alan came at last to the end of the ammunition that had bulged out their trousers' pockets. They clubbed their rifles and waded into a melee that staggered back and forth between two office buildings, across the scarlet-stained grass. Then Alan lost his rifle, and drew his automatic. The range was always short and his hand was steady as a gran-

ite statue's. He was recognizing his foemen at every turn, and putting away the recognition and thinking, *They are rebels from the stars, mutineers against a good people, it was their plottings brought on the smashing of our cities. This is not Dr. Coulterre, it's a creature eight hundred years old who wanted to make me into a brainless slave. That isn't Dr. Simms curled up with my bullet in his belly, it's the slayer of a million New Yorkers as sure as if it had put its own damned finger on the trip release.*

He could tell the robots because they yelled, and those he left alone, because the saucermen were shooting them with numbing rays that did not kill. It was a humane method as far as it went. Sometimes he had to blow a robot's brains out, or be slain by him. Then he said, I've killed a friend. He went looking for more aliens to fight.

In all the press of bodies Alan and Brave were easiest to see. Brave was huge and his head was that of a savage buck, the lips writhed back from teeth athirst for blood; Alan, naked to the waist and with a white bandage over his right ear, put on by a surgeon in the saucer, was a figure differing radically from the barbaric saucermen and the sedately-clothed rebels and robots. They had taken off their shirts in the dance for a better reason than holding the attention of the soldiers. Among a hundred men like them they would have

been indistinguishable had they stayed fully clothed. It's simple, he thought to tell the good guys from the bad guys; the good guys haven't got any shirts.

The two of them made excellent targets. Brave knew he carried a slug in his leg just next the groin; Alan had no idea whether he had been hit. Enemies were continually firing at them both.

Alan was knocked to the turf by a man who leaped on his back and beat at his head with a pistol butt. Brave swung the rifle, a terrible war club in his hands, and broke the man's head like a rotten gourd. Alan got up with the feeling that he should have a headache. But he felt nothing.

Then the rebel outlanders gave up. Suddenly, all over the scattered fields of battle, they had thrown down their weapons and thrust up their hands above their heads in the universal signal of surrender. Their robot people followed suit. The saucermen had won. Project Star was theirs.

### CHAPTER XIII

THEY were back at the temporary base of the disks, sitting on the grass in the shade of the great ships, the sun just going down behind them. Brave's slug had been extracted and the wound bandaged with ointments that eased the pain. Bill Thihling, who had been knocked

cold early in the fight, was sucking on a lozenge that was lessening his headache by the minute. Alan had not been shot and the beating his head had taken did not worry him, for pain was forever a stranger. He sat with Unquote asleep in his lap and Win's hand held tight in his.

"I don't want to live four hundred years," he said. "I want to die in the same years that Brave and my friends go. I don't want to be invulnerable; I want to stick myself with a needle and yell Ouch. I don't want to move like a hopped-up panther, and know what people are thinking, and send brainstorms out to sea from my little skull. I want to be me again." His words were light and half-whimsical, but his thoughts were black.

"Same here, baby," said the girl. She put up a hand to adjust her amethyst halter and his eyes followed it; she laughed. "At least your baser instincts are still intact, thank God."

Rob Pope said, "There's a lot they have to explain to us yet. We seem to have heard the final chapter of a thousand-page book. They haven't even said who they are, or which system they come from, or what Mac's gang did that they were exiled for."

"And by the way," said Win indignantly, "no one's told me yet why they attacked Project Star on the ground instead of bombing it. Give."

"Yes, love. They attacked it

that way because they didn't want to damage any of the experimental stuff and the disks. They lost four disks in space, coming here, and they're overcrowded; besides having Mac's crew to take home for trial. They need disks. And they're interested in seeing what advances we may have made on fuel and instruments, advances that might give them ideas. All quite logical."

"Sure, sure. Everybody knew but Winnie."

"Between their numbing rays and our preliminary work, we managed to save nearly all the normal humans on the colony grounds, and about seventy per cent of the robots. There are aliens there now, guarding them and the disks and the whole project."

The leader came over to them and squatted on the grass, radiating intelligence and power. "There's quite a man," said Rob in spite of himself.

"He is that. I wonder how such advanced people happened to evolve such barbaric ornaments and clothing?" Win said.

THE leader smiled. Evidently the blood Alan had seen on his chest had been someone else's, for he was unhurt. Now he said to their minds, "The girdles and arm bands are traditional. They go back farther than the oldest histories, and date perhaps from our original home, which was on a different planet from our present one. We consid-

er them attractive, if gaudy and a little unfitted for our sort of civilization; but it would be unthinkable to change our mode of dress after so many centuries."

"And *that* is the attitude I rebelled against," said Mac aloud, from his place between two guards. "That's how they look at everything. Jee-blighted-rusalem, can you blame me?" He stared at his manacled wrists. "I used to go around the cities in a kind of toga that appealed to my esthetic sense. My God, I was shunned. I was a pariah. No armband."

The leader smiled again. "My nephew exaggerates. Five hundred years haven't calmed that roiling renegade blood."

"I know what you are desirous of knowing. I will try to tell you the story simply and quickly, for I must join my companion ship within two hours in the island which I see you call England." He glanced at Brave and Alan. "First I must thank you for your indispensable help in overcoming the rebels at Project Star."

"We didn't do much for you."

"You fought beside us when you hated us for the bombing of your cities; that implies understanding, if not forgiveness. We appreciate that. You saved innocent lives; that is the best way to help us. To kill is a terrible thing to us. We do not do it lightly. To kill innocents, even in cases of dire necessity, is trebly terrible."

"Your men went at it as if they were born to it," said Brave.

"They do not like it, no, but there is a heritage in our blood of fighting that dates back, as do our clothes, to the times before history."

"Pious old fraud," said McEl-downie, "you love it, but you won't admit it to yourselves. It was we rebels who were the honest ones."

The leader ignored him. "I was about to tell you —"

Mac said aloud, so that the leader's thought waves were garbled, "I could hate you two for running amok alongside these sniveling so-and-sos. You helped kill scores of my companions. You couldn't have been that sure we were wrong, could you? Damn it, I loved those boys. I lived with them for a dozen of your match-spark lifetimes."

"If you speak out of turn again, I shall have you taken into the leaded room of my disk, where your thoughts and words will be confined to yourself. I was about to tell you of our history," the leader thought, looking at Alan's group. "Long, long ago, so long that even we, who live a thousand years, cannot comprehend what a vast reach of time it was, we lived on a planet very like your own. The atmosphere must have been exactly, or nearly exactly, like that of Earth; for you and I have the same lungs, the same organs, and only differ fundamentally in the texture of our skins and the flexibility of our skeletons and muscles."

"Then, for a reason we do not know except by vague and undependable myth, our ancestors left that planet and went out into space. They were already superbly advanced scientists, though they did not have the rays later developed, which gave us our extended life span. They built disks and journeyed out into the star systems, and eventually found a planet that could support their life in the way the mother planet had done. There they settled. The old charts and logs and histories are long since lost, and this is known only by legend and tradition."

"What does legend say sent them away from the first planet?" asked Rob Pope.

"Several things. Terrible wars, the rise of inimical civilizations which would have had to be obliterated to insure peace, which our ancestors did not wish to do—" bovine feces, muttered Mac rudely—"and the sinking of their homeland into the sea."

"Good grief," said Win, opening her eyes wide, "could that have been Atlantis? Here on Earth?"

"The time wouldn't seem to be right," said Bill, "but heaven only knows, it sounds like it."

The leader groped in their minds. "You have a legend of just such a nation here, on this planet," he thought excitedly. "We must investigate it. This may be our home." He chuckled aloud. "Don't worry, we wouldn't come back and settle

in with you. We are too happy on our own world. But it would be wonderfully satisfying to know the truth of our beginnings!"

ALAN felt himself becoming intellectually agog over this matter, and resolutely drew away from it. "Please," he said, "your history."

"Certainly. On the new planet, which we call Tlonis, our race set up a civilization that has endured for many millenia. Our ancestors found no intelligent race on that world, by the way, but only low forms of animal life. The flora is analogous to your own in many ways, as is natural when two planets are so alike.

"For all our recorded history we have been a peaceful people, although in the course of our scientific advancement we have discovered terrible weapons, which we manufactured and put aside in the always possible case of invasion from another system. Our own sun system, in which Tlonis is the ninth planet from the sun, contains no other life at all; but we recognized the possibilities, and built the weapons to be ready. We also improved the disks, and discovered the ray of longevity and that of painlessness. Our astronomy was always our first science, and there I venture to say we outshine you as your sun does your moon."

"He's right," said Mac suddenly, looking up. "Tlonis telescopes make

your Giant Eye look like a gnat's. If you had one here, you could see a candle lighted on the sun."

"Your turn is coming; be silent.

"We have always existed in excellent harmony with one another. Wars are unknown. There is no such thing as territorial expansion, for we are all one nation, one blood. The government is a form of benevolent parliamentary rule."

McEldownie did not venture to interrupt, but his homely face spoke bookshelves of disdain.

"Our joys were intellectual, a reveling in rationality, philosophy and perception of truths, metaphysical reasoning. I am speaking in the past tense; I should not be. These are the things which have always occupied us, and always will."

"Sounds deadly dull," said Rob Pope, and Mac grinned and shook his head in vigorous agreement.

The leader went on. "This sounds too placid to you. We are a different race, remember. It fits our temperaments to a T.

"But there are members of any society whose tastes run counter to the norm of that society; in our case, in our time, it was this nephew of mine and his faction who rebelled. First in dress, as he has said; then by initiating the custom of hunting and killing the lower forms of life for sport, a thing unheard of before they originated it. This was their first serious breach of our laws and customs. From it they went on—talking against the

government, decrying traditions, until at last their mania to be different intensified and turned to violence. In short, they mutinied against the established order of things which had made our race a happy one for untold ages. They wished to substitute ways of life which would have torn us apart with dissension and strife."

"We rebelled against complacency, fatheadedness, hidebound slavishness to tradition, and unutterable dullwitted dullness. You can appreciate that, for cripes' sake," said Mac. "Picture the way of life he's given you a briefing on, and tell me you, especially Alan and Brave, wouldn't have rebelled, even if it meant war, to be allowed the right to live your own lives."

Alan and the great Indian looked at each other. The same thought was in both their minds: it sounded as though Mac and his outlaw crew had been in the right.

THE leader directed a thought at them. "You must realize that this man, my nephew, was not content to share his views with those who agreed with him. He forced an insurrection on a people who had been thoroughly happy. There was bloodshed in a race that had known none for generations. We overcame him and we might have executed him, but it was repugnant to us. So we gave him space disks and fuel and synthetic food machines and all else he would need, he and the

men who had fought for him, and we exiled him to space.

"We knew that somewhere there was a planet which could sustain life. He had a chance of finding it, a small chance, but a chance. As it happens, he did find it."

"After three hundred years of the blackness of the void," said McElownie. "It was the mercy of God we did. Otherwise we'd have lived out our lives in space. Do you see the cruelty that lurks in these people, which they won't recognize? Killing us would have been kind; but they sent us to wander among the galaxies."

"You may tell them briefly what you did then," the leader ordered him. "Be quick, my time is nearly up."

Mac stood up and walked back and forth, clinking his chained manacles. "We found Earth because our detectors told us the atmosphere was the same as that of our world. It was the only one of its kind we'd come across in all those centuries, centuries of sweeping through sun system after sun system.

"Maybe it's the original home planet our ancestors left, and maybe it isn't. I've mucked around with that Atlantis theory too. The names are similar—Atlantis, Tlonis. It isn't important.

"We landed in the late years of your eighteenth century. Our disks were seen and you can still find records of the sightings in the books and periodicals of that time, and of

later times when our lads took the ships out of hiding for practice flights. I never practiced because it's only in the last forty years my crippling wounds have been really healed.

"We more or less took you over. It was reprehensible from your point of view. Don't hate me for it. We had to make you advance a thousand years' worth in two hundred. We wanted to go back to Tlonis and—not conquer it, but make a place for our kind of thinking so we could live there. It's home, after all. We needed disks and an army.

"Sure, we kept you in a stew, worked up, always at war, and so on. It was the only way. You'd always warred before, anyway. Only in times of war could we advance your knowledge of science and make its rapidity seem logical. So we controlled governments and laboratories and brains. If we hadn't, you'd still be in the gunpowder stage, instead of the jet and electronic stage. We aren't all bad. We aren't pure black. We hurt you but as little as we could. We used you as you used to use oxen and horses; but like you loved horses—which often got killed in war, mind you—we loved you."

"Stop apologizing, Mac. We understand your point of view," said Alan. "But we understand this man's, too."

"Sure, sure. Everybody has a right to his own opinion, even if it's a stuffy one."

"Anyhow, in the early '40s we gave you the atom bomb, nuclear fission, that is. And the radiations of those first bombs went out across the great spaces, and twelve years later were detected and analyzed on Tlonis by the astronomers. Uncle's bunch got in an uproar, as we'd known they would, and piled into ships and started out for Earth. We couldn't help that; we'd had to give you fission. We figured we had enough time. We started disk construction and we began to build an invincible army out of your men, by raying them with the painkilling and telepathic rays. We miscalculated the time it would take Uncle to get here. We wanted to meet him in space or bypass him and get to Tlonis with our gang. Maybe, we thought, he wouldn't have connected the atomic explosion with us, anyhow. But he did, and knew we were preparing to invade Tlonis, and he came.

"His scouting ships reached Earth a few months ago, reported back to the main fleet, and down he came, to blunder and take things for granted and make too-hasty decisions, as always; and he murdered more people through hastiness than we ever would have in our scheme of things."

THE leader thought bitterly, "I admit the justice of that. I have said we are more sorry than we can tell." He gestured at Alan. "Consider this as you weigh what my nephew has said. There is a false

sense of kinship between you because of the mutual language. He talks while I must telepath my thoughts to you. Discount that when you judge us, please."

Mac said, "That's right. When you sit down to think us over, just consider the stories, not who told 'em. I believe you'll agree with my way of thinking, whether you hate me for what I've done or not." He moved over in front of Brave. "Oh, you great iron-faced ruffian, you lost me my world, I think. Simply because I liked you too well to kill you, you and your sidekick here. Believe that or not. I have a real affection for you."

It seemed important to the lanky alien. Brave said, "I believe you, Jim."

"Thanks, Brave." He grinned. "Will you shake hands with a fallen angel, or if you prefer with an ambitious devil, John Kiwanawatiwa?"

Brave stood and took his hand. Alan and Bill, Rob and Win did likewise. There was something paradoxically touching about the little ceremony. Then the leader thought at them, "We will take him back for trial, him and those of his mutineers who are still alive. There are some still free in your world. With your permission we will stay on Earth until we have hunted them down. We would also like to study your histories, out of intellectual curiosity, and exchange scientific knowledge with you. These things can be arranged with your govern-

ments after their members have been freed from the hypnosis applied by our rebels."

He paused. "But we owe you this. You are representative of the people of this world. I give you the right to speak for all of them now. Shall we leave you? You hate us, will always hate us for what we did out of blindness and hasty folly. If you say so, you five, then we will get into our ships and go home."

Alan was a little staggered. "We can't speak for our country."

"I am not interested in governments, which are in reality artificial things. I am interested in the people of this planet, and I think you five can speak for them."

Alan did not hesitate. "Then I say, stay till you've found the rebels, and till you've made your researches. You're right, I believe we'll hate you. But it would be insane to pack you off and lose all that you can give us, or have you lose what we may be able to teach you."

The leader smiled. "Then we will stay." He turned to his men and gave an order; shortly many of the blond aliens came trooping out of the disk, carrying machinery. They proceeded to set it up before the Earthmen.

The leader told them, "These will be used on all of you who were tricked or cajoled or forced into the beams of the mutation rays by my nephew and his cohorts. Please stand quietly."

Shafts of violet and indigo color

shot out of the lenses of the machines. It took a full ship's complement of men to work all of them. The lights played across Alan and Win, to a lesser degree on Brave and the scientists. There was no sensation from them.

Then Alan said, "Wow! That hurts my ear something fierce."

Win turned to him. "Your ear hurts, darling?"

"Like a red-hot iron."

Brave clamped his hands on his friend's biceps. "Emir! You can feel pain!"

"Pain . . . my Lord, blessed pain! Oh, how it burns! I've a splitting headache, too." Alan hit Brave in the chest, laughing, and then embraced Win. "Baby, I can feel pain! I'm okay!" He kissed her savagely. She gave a shriek.

"You bit me, you—Alan, I can feel it too!"

"Of course," the leader told them. "You are whole again. The effect of my nephew's rays is dissipated."

Alan sobered. "One thing. Will I still live four hundred years?"

"No. That effect is gone too, unfortunately."

Alan stared around him at his friends. "Thank God," he said quietly.

Then Rob Pope said, "Look, the bubble of that disk is closing!"

IT was true. The leader of the outlanders turned and saw it and gave a loud cry. "He is escaping! You let him out of your sight,

you fools!" he thought angrily. All the gold-and-silver-clad men ran toward the disk. It rose into the air, flipping its edges impudently. Then it gathered speed and shot out of sight.

Brave said, "Jim, old Jim! He's made his break. I kind of thought he would. He was too restless a spirit to sit calmly under chains and captivity!"

The aliens had clustered together and were sending their brain waves out across the land, signalling other disks in remote spots to find and pursue the escaping McEldownie. Alan said, "I almost hope he makes it!"

Then straight across the sky from horizon to horizon a great silver ship flashed, bright in the rays of the vanished sun against a darkening lapis lazuli vault, on its way out to sea in the direction of Africa. The abandoned outlanders were piling into their second disk to give chase.

Brave put his arm over Alan's shoulders. "Chief, I hope he makes

it too. Maybe he was Lucifer, fallen and using us as dogs of war to regain his lost kingdom; or maybe he was really Prometheus, fighting the stodgy gods to bring fire — the fire of real freedom — to his friends. By his lights, he was justified in using us to do it. He caused us an awful throng of troubles in the past two hundred years, but what he gave us may be worth it in the final estimate. And when he had his goal in sight he threw it away because he couldn't bring himself to kill us."

"Prometheus is the word, son. I'd hate to see old Zeus there bring him back in chains, to be bound to the rock for the vultures."

Brave looked into the sky where Jim McEldownie had disappeared. He chuckled deep in his chest.

"He claimed to be the best hot-shot disk pilot in the universe. If he is, I have a notion he'll get away." He rubbed a hand across his chin reflectively. "By the Great Spirit!" he shouted, laughing. "I believe he will!"

—The End—

**FEATURED NEXT ISSUE:—**

**Children of the Chronotron**

**By S. J. BYRNE**

High over the Atlantic the strato-cruiser droned on toward New York. Suddenly the passengers screamed in fear — something had appeared in the narrow aisle of the upper deck. Not a man — or beast — something . . . alien. While men stood awe-struck it took two tiny infants from their mother's arms. And then it vanished. The pilot radioed New York frantically, but New York didn't reply . . . Don't miss this dramatic novel by one of science fiction's top-ranking writers.

**Reserve Your Copy of the December Issue at Your Newsstand — On Sale Sept. 30**

# Vitamins — Germ Killers?

THE role that vitamins play in the human system has been so greatly emphasized that many people think vitamins from a bottle are better than those from food! This distortion and exaggeration has made any new announcement about vitamins open to suspicion.

Nevertheless, medical researchers are working intensively with vitamins, and recently they have uncovered some information which may have tremendous benefits for humans in the future. It has been discovered, first, that there are more vitamins than had been thought originally. Secondly, some of these as yet unknown vitamins,

have the unique faculty of fighting and combatting disease germs.

The laboratories are now working on a method whereby these disease opponents may be isolated and studied so that eventually, it may be possible to combat all disease purely in terms of diet. Thus, to avoid diphtheria let's say, you would be fed a food containing large quantities of "vitamin X."

This is still purely experimental but it promises much for the future. Man may inoculate himself against all germs by simply opening his mouth and shoving down his favorite foods!

\* \* \*

## Eternal Records

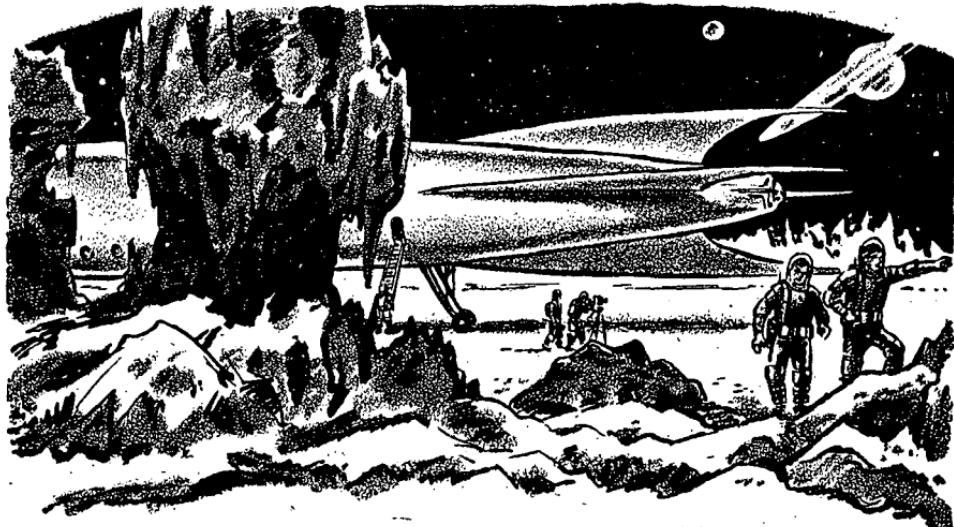
LIBRARIANS and custodians of important public documents are confronted continually with the fragility of their charges. Paper and cloth are not durable and priceless documents rapidly deteriorate. Steps must be taken to keep in perfect condition such things as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, not to mention a multitude of other more commonplace items like books and magazines. The question is, how can they be preserved and yet available at all times? You can't seal everything in an airtight vault!

The rare historical documents, which must be kept available for public observation at all times are being sandwiched between sheets of glass and plastic and kept in glass

chambers filled with helium gas. Oxygen and water vapor, those deadly enemies of paper and cloth are thus effectively excluded and the people of the year 5000 will be able to read the Bill of Rights as clearly as we do.

For lesser books and magazines microfilming provides the answer. On small reels, whole books can be confined ready for reference at the flick of a switch. It is just a bit too early for this to happen, but the time is not too far away when electronics will invade the library so effectively that a man can select any book in the world at the pressing of a button. The musty book stack, like the horse, is not going to be with us for very long!

\* \* \*



**Tad, like other young men, looked to the spaceways for adventure. But George Barlow, like other fathers, knew that disaster would end his—**

# WANDERLUST

*By*

*Alan E. Nourse*

SOMEHOW George Barlow had sensed that something was wrong the moment his son drove into the barnyard that evening. He had been waiting impatiently for Tad's return all afternoon; the men needed those tractor bolts before they could do the mowing. But George had felt the uneasiness, quite suddenly, deep in his chest when he heard the boy's three-wheeler chugging up the rutted country road from town.

He sat quietly, waiting, stroking old Snuffy behind the ears. He heard the little motor-car pop into

silence as Tad drove it into the garage; then there was a long silence! George waited several minutes before running a hand through his tawny hair. "What's that boy doing out there, anyway?" he growled.

Florence Barlow glanced up through the kitchen window. "He's gone up on the ridge," she said. "He's just standing up there, looking down the valley." She turned back to the stove, pushing back an unruly whisp of graying hair.

George sat back in his chair, puffing his pipe, the uneasiness growing. Tad was usually back from town



hours earlier. The oats had to be cut this week—the shipment of Ven- usian *taaro* was due from the next Rocket, and they had to have a field free for it. But still, he knew it was more than the tractor bolts that bothered him.

Then suddenly the door burst open and Tad was there, filling the room with his broad shoulders, whistling tunelessly to himself. A cool east breeze followed him in the door, and with it an aura of excitement. Tad's sunbaked hair was wild from the ride through the wind, his sharp eyes sparkling:

"Dad! The Rocket landed this afternoon. Out at Dillon's Landing. It's three weeks early this time!"

A chill swept up George's spine, tingling his scalp. "Then we should get the *taaro* in a couple of days," he said smoothly.

"We should." Tad's eyes were bright as he patted the dog's head. His whole body seemed alive with excitement. "I walked up on the ridge to get a look at it, dad. It's a beauty—tall and slim—you should see it down there. It catches the sunset like you never saw before—"

He was still talking as he walked out to the kitchen, stooping to kiss his mother on the forehead. "You ought to go up and take a look at it, mom—before the sun's gone."

"I've got plenty to do without going to gawk at a Rocket ship," his mother's voice was sharp. "You have too, for that matter. Did you get the tractor bolts for your father?"

THE boy frowned suddenly, and snapped his fingers. "Plumb forgot them. The ship was landing just as I got into town, so I went over to watch it—" he took his place opposite his father at the table, his face brightening again. He didn't see the cloud on his father's face. "And they let us go inside it to look around, dad. I never saw anything like it. You wouldn't believe that they could get such a ship off the ground. Why, even I can remember when it was all they could do to blast off with a little ten-man ship, and now—why, this one is like a yacht. It's the STAR KING, the newest one in Dillon's fleet."

George Barlow scowled, the tightness in the pit of his stomach suddenly making his food tasteless. "That's lovely," he said sourly. "They can build them a mile long for all I care. They still aren't fit for rats. At least here you can wash your face if you want to—" He turned back to his plate, hoping the discussion was over, hoping—

"But this one had complete showers, soft bunks, everything. Hydroponic tanks that make the experimental station look like pikers—"

"Eat," said George.

Tad lapsed into silence, the hearty silence of a hungry nineteen-year-old before a full dinner plate. His father took another mouthful and put down his fork, his appetite gone. He could feel the tension growing, the tightness of his breathing. He sensed his wife's apprehension as she

too slowed and stopped eating. As if she, too, were waiting—

"Saw Len Cooper when he came off the ship, too, dad. Do you remember Len? This was his first cruise." Tad's eyes sparkled. "He says there's nothing like it, that Rocket life. They stopped on Venus, you know, and then did a reconnaissance in toward the Mercury orbit before they came back. Almost five years away from Earth! They've got a stack of reports as big as an almanac for printing. And Len—you know how scrawny he was? He's put on muscle now. Looks great." Tad put down his fork, a subtle change in his voice, his hand trembling. "We had a long talk, dad. Len says—"

"Len Cooper's a fool!" George Barlow's voice snapped irritably. "He hasn't got all his marbles. A kid like that—all the potential in the world—brains, opportunity—and what does he do with it? Shoots it into Rockets! First cruise, huh? It isn't his last, by a long shot. Those Rocket boys aren't stupid. They know it takes a good cruise to teach a youngster his way around out there. He can't begin to work for his wages until the second cruise, or the third. And then it's too late to come back—"

Tad fiddled with his fork, his eyes down. The room was silent; even Florence sat tense, startled by the outburst. George sat glumly. That was stupid, he thought. Inexcusably stupid. You'll have

to face it some day — you know that. Now? Maybe—oh, Lord, not now—maybe tomorrow. But what could you say? What if it is now? His hand trembled as he fumbled awkwardly for his pipe. Where were the words, the phrases, the arguments, so long rehearsed, so sensible, so fatherly?

"Dad."

His fingers were like ice on the pipe bowl. Not tomorrow, then. Now.

"Dad."

"Yes, Tad."

The boy looked straight at his father, his voice very low. "I'm going, dad," he said. "I'm going with it."

THE chill widened in George Barlow's stomach, spreading into his legs and chest. He heard his wife's startled gasp, and the chill deepened. He searched for words, and no words came. How long, now, had he prepared, rehearsed? And now—nothing. He just sat there in the dead still room—

"Well, I never heard anything more ridiculous in all my life!" Florence burst out, finally. "You're crazy, Tad. Plumb crazy. Do you mean to sit there and say that you're going to give up college, throw away this farm?" She set the cream pitcher down with a thump. "It's out of the question. You just can't mean it."

Tad wriggled uneasily. "I do mean it, mom. The STAR KING is signing up crew tomorrow. They

have places for four novices, this time. They'll take me. I know they will. I—I asked this afternoon. I want to go."

George Barlow gripped the edge of the table, fighting for control. "Don't be silly, boy," he said finally, his voice tight. "You're no Rocket man. You don't know what you're saying—" his hands trembled. "Space is no place for a fellow like you — you belong here, studying, working — not hopping around space like a common tramp." He tamped tobacco into his pipe bowl with an air of finality. "Every boy nowadays thinks about going to Space, I know. The fleets are growing larger, taking more and more boys—but the smart ones stay home."

Tad's voice was low and quiet, more deadly firm than George had ever heard it. "You don't understand, dad. I know you don't like it—I know you think it's foolish not to finish college, you hate to see me leave home—but you don't understand." He looked up, his boyish face pale under deep summer tan. "I can't explain it, dad. Ever since I was little, since I saw my first Rocket shooting up into the sky toward the stars, I knew I had to go, too, sometime." He shook his head helplessly. "It's what I've wanted all my life, dad. I've got to go."

"But the farm, son—" Florence was almost in tears. "Doesn't that mean anything to you? Your fam-

ily's been here for a hundred years, Tad. It's yours, as soon as you're ready to farm it. Don't you care about it after all these years?"

"You know I care, mom." The boy avoided her tearful eyes, ran a hand through his hair. "You know I like the place, and I feel awful running out after all the work you and dad and the men have put in, building it up—but I couldn't make a go of it. I don't want to be earth-bound, tied down to a piece of land all my life—"

His mother's face was suddenly very, very tired. "Oh, you fool," she said, her voice bitter. "You don't know how you'll long for green grass again—" her face flared red in anger, "You've barely started to shave, and you want to go to Space. Well, it's nonsense! You can't do it, that's final. Tell him, George! Tell him why he can't go—tell him why—"

"*Florence!*"

She stopped short, eyes wide. "George, I'm sorry—"

His voice was sharp, urgent. "I think—maybe Tad and I ought to talk this out—ourselves—"

"I'm sorry, George." Florence Barlow rose silently. She began clearing the table, her eyes brimming.

Tad's face was troubled. "I wish you wouldn't make a fuss, dad. I suppose it's a surprise to you both—"

George smiled sourly. "Hardly. We've been around a while, Tad. We saw Len Cooper go, and a half-

dozen like him. We knew you'd get the bug sooner or later. But you've got to understand why we can't allow it."

THE room was silent, except for the faint rustling of the breeze through the curtains. "You don't know what you're walking into, Tad. None of you boys really know. You only see one side of the picture, the excitement and adventure. I know, it's a thrilling picture, but the thrill wears off, and then you have the long dull days of waiting, sitting, always waiting, with nothing to see but the bulkhead and a dozen men cramped into impossible tight quarters without any room to move around. You don't know how you'd get to hate those men, how you'd wish you could be alone for just a little while, how you'd long for privacy. And you don't realize the danger—not the exciting, bravado kind of danger that you read about, but the live, horrible danger of depending for your life on a little sliver of metal.

"So many things can go wrong, and any one of them means you're through. Not a brave death, son, nor a heroic death—just a very lonely death, where you freeze and starve, and feel the life choke out of you. There are so many ways to die in Space, such horrible ways, so easily. And there isn't any reward worth the risk. It's all risk, and you have nothing for it. A few days of glory when you're back

home, and then you're off again. Once you go, you're gone. You'll never come back. Only the lucky ones come back. You'll be in Space 'til it kills you."

"But the colonies, dad. Mars Mountain, Player's Folly, Ironstone—they're all going concerns. They need men, lots of men, with ideas—men who aren't afraid of work—"

"The colonies!" George Barlow's voice rose angrily, his control wearing thin. "Why the colonies? What glory can you see in working a lifetime to squeeze a living out of Mars rock? Scraping and fighting, squeezing every last drop of water, every possible inch of topsoil to dig up enough to keep barely alive—and then dying thirty years before your time? What can you see in that? Or Venus, where you sweat, and waste away, until the fungus gets into your lungs and blood, and you finally just go to sleep forever? You're crazy, Tad! You can't do it!"

Tad shuffled his feet, his eyes downcast. "I knew you wouldn't understand. I can't explain it, dad—I don't know the words. But I've got to go, even if you don't—"

George's face flushed in exasperation. "Now look. Just listen a minute. I understand perfectly, I just—"

"*You don't understand!*" The boy's eyes blazed in sudden anger, his voice was bitter. "How could you understand? You've been nothing but a slogging dirt farmer all

your life! How could you understand why I'd want to go to the stars? What do you know about Mars, or Venus? *You've never been there!*"

George Barlow sat stiff, as though he had been struck. The room was tense, and he heard the boy breathing across the room. "Then you give me no choice," he said finally, his voice suddenly tired and barely audible. "I'm your father. I forbid you to go."

There was a long, silent moment. Then: "I'm sorry, dad. I'm going anyway."

GEORGE Barlow lay in bed, breathing quietly. The room was close, the air stuffy and humid. He heard his wife's steady breathing, peaceful now, after sobbing herself to sleep. And somehow, deep within him, he seemed to hear the steady pom-pom-pom of spaceship engines, deep, throaty, thrilling, throbbing, vibrating—

Calling—

He rose quietly and walked to the window. He heard Snuffy stir herself, heard her claws scrabbling on the bare farmhouse floor, and felt her warm muzzle, firm and comforting in his hand. Then he heard nothing but the buzzing of cicadas, the quiet night-sounds of the farm, smelled the cool, hearty odor of hay and clover, heard the occasional uneasy stomping of cattle in the barn. And still, deep in his mind, he heard older sounds, more

familiar sounds, sounds tinged with fear, horror, hate, desperation—he shook his head, trying to forget, but there was excitement there, too, that intangible, overpowering thrill of the wanderlust—

Memories flooded back into his mind, memories he had thought long ago blotted out and forgotten. The rich thrill of excitement as the last seconds crowded in close, with the strap cutting a deep welt across his chest—the muffled roar, the powerful sledge-hammer blow, driving his stomach and legs down like lead, then easing, easing gently into no pressure, then less than no pressure—the exhilarating, wonder-filled vision of the Earth rushing away, dwindling into a mottled patchwork, still dwindling—

Oh, he understood, all right. He knew what tugged at his son's heels, he knew the consuming thrill, the insatiable hunger to reach higher and higher, to seek out unknown places. He knew the wonder of stepping on another land, an alien land, the thrill of watching two moons creep softly over a reddish horizon. He knew the deep, rich thrill of pushing the frontier outward until the sun winked coldly like another star. Memories flooded his mind, and he remembered too well the insistent tug of the wanderlust at his heels, the call of the open road, the call of space! And he knew that, try as he would, no Earth-bound answer would ever drive it away—

Yes, he understood. But deep in

his heart he felt the coldness, the pain and agony, the sense of bitter loss. He was one of the lucky. He had come back. Tad would never come back. The odds were too great, there were too few of the lucky. And it was better *not* to be one of the lucky, better to die out there, forgotten, unmourned.

**M**AYBE he should have told the boy while he was young, tried to teach him, to make him understand. Perhaps he'd been wrong to conceal it all these years, to lie to Tad, to make Florence conceal, too. Perhaps Tad should have been told—but even knowing that someday the wanderlust would come, he knew he couldn't have told him. Better to conceal, to wait for the contempt, wait to hear the words, short, bitter words: *"How could you ever understand? You've never been there—"*

George felt the perspiration trickle down his neck. How could he explain the things he hardly dared think about himself? The fear, the bitterness, the horror? Tad would be sleeping now, peacefully, in his room, his bag half packed on the dresser, dreaming dreams of wonder in his sleep, and never dreaming for an instant of the terror, the pain—never knowing how hard a taskmaster the wanderlust could be, what terrible fees it could exact.

He knew he couldn't fight it. He had known since Tad was born that it would be useless. For the young

saw only what they wanted to see.

And suddenly George was fumbling in his dresser drawer, frantically searching for the small oblong box, rushing, before he changed his mind. His hands closed on the small container, and its contents was cold between his fingers. And then he was in Tad's room, quietly, seeking the bag, half packed, a few meager clothes, a few meager memories to go away with a hopeful heart. He fumbled in the bag, and suddenly the memories closed in on George Barlow, and he was living again the horrible moments, the rumbling, jolting thunder in the bowels of the ship; the frantic scrambling down the dark passageways, the men, fear-crazed and tumbling over each other in free fall—the gleaming white-hot of the atomic fires gone wild; the screams of agony, the crashing, fiery groping through oven-like chambers, the twisting, wrenching of controls, fighting to stay alive, fighting in blazing agony, fire burning to the bottom of his soul—

The little metal disc slipped into the boy's bag, down between a pair of pants and a book; a thin metal disc of pure gold, a simple symbol, with simple words: *To George L. Barlow, for Heroism in Space—*

He dropped the disc into the boy's bag and stumbled back to his room. He sat in the silence stroking old Snuffy's soft muzzle, sat in darkness, eternal since that hour of terror, as tears streamed down scarred cheeks from his sightless eyes . . .



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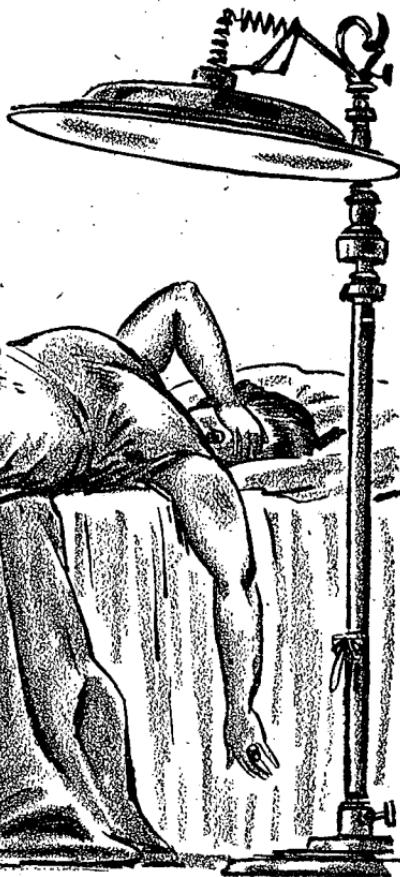
# SKIN GAME

By  
John W. Jakes

**Fred's lamp was a cosmetic triumph—with it women could tint their skin any desired shade. Of course, he needed a satisfactory test case . . .**

**“Y**OU realize, of course, that I would not ordinarily do such a thing,” Lady Xenia Bangerly said loftily, rearranging the boa of blue-green Jovian *tik* feathers around her massive shoulders. “In fact, I only came here as a favor to Mr. Burns.”

“Of course, of course, Lady Xenia,” Mr. Fred Ajax murmured,



seating himself on the edge of his desk. "Mr. Burns told me that you were an old friend."

"That's right," Sailor Burns said brightly from where he sat in the corner, bulging out of the foam chair in his checked sport coat. He had a massive round head, cauliflowered ears, a dull expression and a good-natured smile. Once the toast of the System Wrestling Telefilms, he was now the right hand man of Ajax Enterprises, a bustling concern composed of the office, a small laboratory for creating inventions (which were the work of Fred Ajax) and a print shop for making cartons and advertising posters (which Ajax wrote) to merchandise the latest brainstorm.

"I knew Lady Xenia on Gany-mede," Burns added bluntly. Lady Xenia coughed as the large gentleman went on, "Only then, she wasn't so much of a lady . . ."

Lady Xenia glared at him and coughed again. Fred wanted to heave a chair across the room and silence the Sailor, but he stuffed a cigar in his own mouth as a pacifier instead. Burns blushed and said, "No offense meant, uh . . . your Highness, only the time I saw you in Smet's Volcanic Honky Tonk, you were . . . well . . . less dressed."

"I prefer to forget my theatrical career and the part of my life before I met Lord Bangerly," she said, but she could not suppress a rather wicked giggle. "I remember that night, Mr. Burns. You bought me cognac."

"You wanted it," Sailor grinned. "I didn't know what it was."

"Why don't we all forget it?" Fred interjected hastily, gesturing with his cigar. He shivered inwardly as he visualized the Collection Agents hauling him into court. "I'm sure you're more interested in our latest product, you're Ladyship."

"I wouldn't say that," Lady Xenia countered, sniffing at a handkerchief. "I don't know what it is."

"Well," Fred said busily, "I am an inventor, you see, and I've come up with a product that's sure to be a hit with the ladies." He chuckled broadly and heartily. Lady Xenia did not seem amused. "Well . . . uh . . ." he continued nervously, "this product . . . well, any product manufactured in these times needs endorsement. You understand. That's why we thought if you approved of the product, it would be sure to sell."

"I can tell you frankly, Mr. Ajax," Lady Xenia replied, "that since Lord Bangerly died, I take a dim view of business investments."

FRED went on quickly, "You see, Lady Xenia, we know that you are giving your annual Inter-System Ball next week at your estate, and that you'll be wearing the Bangerly Diamond, and with our product . . ." He stopped. The mental visions were too much. What he could do with the Bangerly Diamond! he thought. What he could do with any diamond. Money, even.

"Just exactly what is your product?" Her Ladyship inquired.

Fred rubbed his hands together. "Well, well, well. I knew we'd get around to that. Sailor, bring in the lamp." Burns arose and went into the laboratory, returning a moment later with a contraption resembling an antique sun lamp.

Sailor set the lamp up next to Lady Xenia, who moved her chair slightly. "Is it dangerous?" she asked.

"Not at all. That," said Fred, gesturing broadly, "is the Ajax Skin-of-Delight Lamp."

"What does it do?" she asked.

"Adds new charm and beauty to the personality. Adds alluring novelty and exotic charm, makes you the rage of every social gathering," Fred finished. "I wrote those words myself, your Ladyship, to fit this little marvel."

"I wish you would be more specific," she objected, fidgeting a little. "I have a luncheon appointment at one."

Fred removed the good-fellow grin from his face, put his finger tips together and frowned. "This lamp, an invention of mine, subtly tints the pigment of the human skin and changes it to a new and delightful color. Any color, in fact. Any color in the known spectrum."

Lady Xenia threw up her hands. "Oh, good heavens. Sounds monstrous."

"May I demonstrate?"

"Certainly not."

"Lady Xenia," Fred wheedled, "I assure you, it's perfectly harmless. You adjust this dial . . . here . . . to the proper color, and press this button . . . here . . . and allow your skin to absorb the beneficial rays for thirty seconds. Then, to remove the new pigmentation, you merely press this other button . . . here. It's very simple."

She stared at the lamp with suspicion. Meanwhile, Fred prepared himself for the crowning sales point, carefully thought-out from his file of personal data about the woman. "I know how proud you are of the Bangery Diamond," he crooned. "At the Ball next week, imagine yourself in a fluffy white evening gown, the diamond on your bosom, sparkling in all its luster . . ." He hesitated and raised an arm dramatically. ". . . the diamond, contrasting with your skin, a skin of exquisite sky blue. What a sensation!"

She peered at him a moment, then laughed. "It *would* be rather novel."

"May I demonstrate now?"

"Well . . . I suppose so." She drew off her glove. "But only on my hand."

**S**MILING expansively, Fred moved around the desk, adjusted the dial for Sky Blue, and flicked the switch. With a gallant gesture, he swept her hand into his and placed it beneath the faintly buzzing bulb. In thirty seconds, he turned off the lamp. Her entire hand, wrist, fingers and all, were tinted a delicate

blue. She held the hand up before her eyes.

"Ahhh," she exclaimed softly.

"Pretty, ain't it?" Sailor said.

"Yes . . . yes . . . it's lovely . . . it truly is . . ."

Fred swept her hand away again and placed it back under the lamp. He thumbed the Remover switch, and in thirty seconds the natural color was restored. "See?" he said. "Simple, eh? And safe."

She eyed him warily once more. "Mr. Ajax, I like your idea. In fact, I will use the lamp as you suggested, provided you answer one question." She hesitated. "What's in it for you?"

Fred spread his hands. "Nothing, nothing at all. Merely tell your friends when they ask you about your lovely new skin that you obtained it from Ajax Industries. The publicity will be sufficient."

Lady Xenia rose hastily. "I must be going to my luncheon engagement. May I take the lamp with me?"

"Certainly," Fred replied. "I'll carry it out to the street for you." He nudged Sailor and whispered furtively, "Pick up the lamp."

"You said . . ." the large man began.

Fred nudged him again. "The lamp. The lamp."

Sighing resignedly, Sailor hefted the invention while Fred pulled the door open and stepped aside for Lady Xenia to pass through. They proceeded down the hall and into the bright sunlight, where a chauffeur

took the lamp from Burns and placed it in the car. Lady Xenia was staring down the street, frowning.

"Is anything wrong?" Fred asked helpfully.

"That man again." She indicated a darkly-coated person leaning against a lamp post half a block down, puffing nervously on a cigarette and surveying them with a scarred and suspicious-looking countenance. "I've seen him several times during these past few days. He bothers me, somehow."

"Looks like a criminal type," Fred said. "Sailor, do you know the face?"

The Sailor looked up at the sky and squinted. "He sure looks familiar, but I got so many faces stored up in the . . . like you say . . . photographic negative centers of my brain; I can't sort them all out very easy . . ."

"Well, if you come up with anything, please let me know," Lady Xenia said, getting into her car. "And I'll be sure to tell my friends about the lamp at the Ball next week." She waved and the car shot away in a haze of soy bean smoke.

"I wish they'd stop processing that stuff to run cars," Fred said, hacking out a cough as they returned to the office. Then he rubbed his hands together. "Aha! We're in! This is our big break, Sailor!"

Sailor stared dreamily out the window. "Boy, she sure was a doll. I'll never forget *that* night. They whistled for eighteen encores. "Hey!" He turned around abruptly.

"She didn't invite us to the Ball!" Fred's face sobered. "Listen, Burns, why don't you think of something once in a while? We've got to be there to take orders for the lamp!"

"We can fix it some way."

"We'd better fix it, or I'll fix you." Fred glowered darkly. But the large man was staring dreamily into the sky once more, recalling exotic delights years before in a Ganymede night spot when the temperature was a hundred and twenty-four in the dark and the cognac flowed free.

IN the following days, Fred Ajax began to have doubts about the Skin-of-Delight Lamp. Like most of his inventions, it was hastily thought out, hastily assembled. What if something went wrong? What if the Remover went bad and Lady Xenia remained a bilious green? The thoughts disturbed him but he concentrated on finding a way to crash Lady Xenia's party.

The entrance proved to be a baker, brother-in-law of a tubeman at Riley Field whom Ajax fleeced at dice at periodic intervals. Ajax engineered a little session with the cubes, and when the tubeman lost, Fred tore up the IOUs in return for two baker's uniforms. The bakers were providing pastries for the Ball.

The Bangerly Estate, lying a few miles from the outskirts of the city, was aglow with dim lights on the evening of the dance. The mansion was gaily decorated, and the grounds

were alive with soft violins coming from boxes hidden in the hearts of rosebushes. Lanterns of myriad colors swayed everywhere. Beginning at eight o'clock helicopters and air taxis buzzed down out of the night sky depositing the great . . . military, literary, political, educational, theatrical . . . from all over the System. Special rooms had been provided, Fred noted, for natives of Jupiter and Venus, where they could bask in ammoniated cold or loll in steam-saturated heat respectively.

A few minutes before eight, Ajax and the Sailor finished juggling their trays of rolls and stepped into an expansive broom closet, reappearing in formal dress. Ajax carried several order blanks in his pockets, and as the glittering crowd began to gather, he and Burns roamed through the chandeliered halls, over the gaily decked lawns, and through dimly lit gardens, listening to the conversation.

They saw Lady Bangerly once, but she did not see them. They stepped behind a high hedge and peeked out as she went by, followed by a group of men and women. Her gown was white, and her skin a pale blue, true to the suggestion. And the Bangerly Diamond glittered against her skin with the sheen of cold, hard money.

Fred sighed happily as he heard the women asking excitedly where she had found that exquisite paint for her skin.

"But it isn't paint, my dear,"

Lady Bangerly replied, fading into the distance. "It's a lamp."

More chorused ohs and ahs. "A lamp?"

"Yes, my dear, the Skin-of-Delight lamp, manufactured by Ajax Enterprises . . ."

"I *must* have one. A jade skin would set off . . . " The voices died in a muted hum.

Behind the hedge, Ajax lit a cigar and offered one to Burns in a moment of generosity. "The old girl really came through. We'll give her a couple of hours and then start circulating."

**B**UT at twenty minutes past ten, in the main ballroom where the grand march was assembling, Lady Bangerly suddenly shrieked. Ajax darted through the crowd to a good vantage point and groaned. Friends were shrinking away from her, and she stood in the middle of the highly polished floor . . . *changing color*.

Her skin altered violently from blue to bright yellow, to a green, jerked back to orange, vibrated into purple. She trembled visibly and began to cry. Ajax cursed quietly, wishing that he had finished college and learned a little bit more about all the complex *d* rays and *z* rays that went into the makeup of the lamp. They were in for it now.

Sailor pushed close to him. "Oh," cried Lady Xenia, "wait till I get my hands on those . . . those charlatans . . . ruining me . . . ruining me like this . . ." Her skin was now

a pale pink, changing rapidly into gray. The guests murmured in shocked tones.

"What are we going to do, boss?" Sailor mumbled.

"I don't know, I don't know. Don't talk so loud. How about hopping the night jet for Luna?"

Several of Lady Bangerly's personal attendants, male and female, were ushering her from the ballroom as she trembled and pressed a hand to her throat, clutching at the large diamond. Her skin was going through the green shades again. In the distance, one of the orchestras was waggishly playing an old favorite, *Over the Rainbow*.

There was a furtive scurry in the other side of the crowd. Ajax strained and caught sight of a scarred and unpleasant face bobbing above a full dress suit. The man was excitedly following in the direction Lady Bangerly had taken, trying not to appear obvious among the babbling spectators.

Wheels clicked suddenly in the head of Fred Ajax. "Sailor," he whispered, "see that man?"

The Sailor peered. "That one?" "Yes. Recognize him?"

"No, no . . . yeah! We saw him the other day outside the office. I've been trying to place him . . . I ought to know . . . let me see . . . my memory . . ." He tapped his head, closed his eyes, and grunted. Several ladies in the vicinity moved away. The Sailor's eyes popped open. "Got him!"

“Who is he?” Ajax asked breathlessly.

“Easy-Finger Edmund, slickest ice snatcher this side of Port of Mars!”

Ajax snapped his fingers. “Brother, I smell trouble. With Lady Bangerly conking out this is a great time for somebody to grab the diamond. Come on.”

“Where we going?” said Sailor, not budging.

Ajax jerked his coat tails. “After our reputations. Hurry up.”

They threaded their way through the bejeweled and bemaled crowd, with Ajax keeping a wary eye on the flapping coat-tails of Easy-Finger Edmund who hurried through the ballroom, across the main entrance hall and up the broad richly carpeted staircase.

As they followed, Ajax had dreadful visions of law suits, damage suits, sessions in Interstellar Court and imprisonment on the Moon for fifty years.

THEY pushed past more of the personal attendants, Ajax firing a line of fast talk about doctors, hospitals and emergencies. As he hoped, they took him for a specialist called in on the case and the liveried ranks parted before him.

“But sir!” one of the butlers called as they hurried on down the cavernous hall, “another doctor has already gone in.”

“He’s smart!” Ajax whispered under his breath, pulling up short be-

fore the entrance to Lady Xenia’s boudoir. Easy-Finger Edmund was about to add insult to injury, and perhaps also add another fifty years to their sentences if the diamond was filched.

Fred jerked the doors open and strode into the huge bedroom with the Sailor right behind him. There was Easy-Finger Edmund, his scarred face drawn into an ugly scowl, menacing Lady Xenia with a pistol. Lady Xenia, however, wasn’t paying much attention. She lay on the huge curtained bed, her eyes closed, gasping, as her skin performed the technicolor antics that had begun in the ballroom. The Bangerly Diamond was clutched in Edmund’s hand.

“What the hell is . . .” Edmund began. Ajax retreated a step, pushing the Sailor forward.

“Go get him . . . let him have it,” Ajax ordered, and as Burns started forward in a half crouch, Fred darted to a decorative end table and hefted a heavy vase, heaving it at Edmund’s weapon hand. The thief snarled as the vase hit home, deflecting his first shot into the ceiling. Lady Xenia opened her eyes just in time to see the vase smash to bits. She screeched again and fell back.

Sailor moved in then, relieved Easy-Finger Edmund of his pistol, and treated him to a casually executed combination pile driver and cobra twist. Edmund wound up groaning on the floor.

But Fred saw his problem was far from solved. Lady Xenia's skin was on another trip through the orange belt. He glanced desperately about the room, his eyes resting finally upon the Skin-of-Delight lamp in one corner.

He began jerking it to pieces. He found the trouble, a couple of old coils not working properly, and with a collection of bobby pins, nail files and orangewood sticks from Lady Xenia's dresser, he altered the lamp circuits so that the only rays it could possibly give off would be Removers.

"Lady Xenia," he called softly. "Lady Xenia." Sweat beaded his brow.

Her Ladyship groaned.

"Lady Xenia, I'm going to fix you up! It's Ajax, Fred Ajax. I'm going to turn the lamp back on."

Lady Xenia let out an unearthly howl and tried to burrow under the covers. Ajax motioned to the Sailor, who moved to the bed and held her deftly by the shoulders while Ajax flicked the switch. The bulb buzzed ominously for thirty seconds, and he switched it off. Lady Xenia stared at him, horror stricken, and Fred prayed that the principle of the Remover hadn't gone off the beam too.

It hadn't. Lady Xenia's skin began to lose its current aquamarine hue and modulated slowly back into a stable, healthy pink. Ajax sighed loudly. "There you are," he said. "Just like new."

At this moment, Easy-Finger Ed-

mund got off the floor and hit him over the head with a plastic stool.

FRED reeled, electric lights popping in his head. His legs felt rubbery. He heard the Sailor swearing. Somebody inside his head dropped a black curtain over his eyes, and he stood there jiggling unsteadily on his feet until the curtain gradually dissolved. Fred looked around.

He gasped.

The situation had reversed itself. Easy-Finger Edmund had snatched his weapon from the floor. Now he confronted Ajax, his mouth shaped in an unpleasant grin. Once more, the Bangerly Diamond was in his fist.

"All right, buster," Edmund snarled, "I've had about enough of you."

Fred looked around again, blinking owlishly. His head still wasn't clear. Lady Xenia, reclining on the bed, had her hand pressed to her forehead. She stared at Ajax, wide-eyed, and pointed dramatically.

There lay the Sailor, blood on his head where Edmund's gun had connected. "That monster struck Mr. Burns!" Lady Xenia cried. "Do something!"

Ajax contemplated the possibilities as Easy-Finger Edmund laughed ominously. "This is the end of the line, buster." He glowered down at his weapon. "You won't have any more tax returns to pay . . ."

Fred gulped. As he stared at the gloomy aperture of the gun, he suddenly saw something else.

"Wait a minute, Easy-Finger . . ."  
Fred gasped, holding out his hands pleadingly.

"Wait for nothin'!"  
"The diamond!" Fred wheezed.  
"Look . . . the diamond!"

Easy-Finger Edmund scowled and glanced down. "What the . . ."

It was a unique sight. The fabulous Bangerly diamond was no longer blue-white. At the moment it was a delicate chartreuse, changing to pink, scarlet, and finally a deep yellow.

"What's going on here?" Edmund growled uncertainly.

"Uh . . . uh . . ." Fred stammered, "the diamond's been affected!"

"Been affected by what?"  
Fred gestured. "By the Skin-of-Delight Lamp! And unless I personally . . . personally, mind you, perform certain operations on that diamond, it will be worthless—as you can see."

Fred waited tensely. Easy-Finger Edmund took another look at the now-orange stone. He thrust it forward grudgingly. "You win. But no funny stuff," he warned.

"No, no, of course not . . ." Fred mumbled. He rushed over to the lamp, the diamond clutched in his hand. Carefully now, Fred my boy, he told himself. We want to stay alive, don't we?

WITH furious haste he un-did his earlier repairs, rewiring the circuits back to their original

connections.

Cautiously, he glanced over his shoulder. His body concealed the lamp as he made a last-minute adjustment to triple the output.

"Let's see what you're doing," Easy-Finger said harshly, and walked over.

"I'm going to switch it on," Fred said. "Want to watch?" Edmund bent over to peer at the lamp. Then Fred flicked it on and in one lightning motion, whipped the bulb around so that the rays played upon Edmund's face. The man let out a screech.

"Aha!" Fred shouted, pointing at Edmund's face. "You're finished!"

Edmund cowered back, catching sight of himself in a tall mirror. His skin turned blue, then green, gold, black, and finally magenta. He dropped his weapon, pressing his hands to his cheeks in terror.

"You did it to me . . ." he moaned. "Oh . . . oh . . ." The groans grew louder.

Fred scooped up the gun with a quick gesture. On the floor, Sailor was sitting up slowly, shaking his head painfully.

"Lady Xenia . . ." Fred began tensely.

The door of the bedroom banged open. A brash-looking young man, pad in hand, swiveled his gaze around the room, saw Her Ladyship and began to speak in a rapid-fire voice.

"Lady Xenia, my name's Karns, Karns of the Universal Telo-Sheet. Got a phone call from our society

reporter who was covering the ball. Said you were changing color. What's the story? You got a story for me?" He leaned forward expectantly, just as a group of angry servants pushed through the door waving their fists at the reporter.

"You can't come in here . . ." one of them shouted.

"Got a story, Lady Xenia? When do you change color? You look nice and pink right now."

Ajax stepped forward: This was his opportunity . . . now or never. "I've got a story, Karns."

Karns looked him over. "Who're you?"

"Ajax, Fred Ajax." He waved. "Write that down." Then he pointed. "There is the notorious jewel thief, Easy-Finger Edmund. He was trying to steal the Bangerly Diamond."

Karns' eyes showed surprise. "Easy-Finger Edmund! By gosh, you're right. And he's changing color . . ."

EDMUND groaned in a most unhappy manner. At the sound of his name, two of the servants had rushed forward excitedly and clapped their hands on him. Edmund stood submissively, head bowed to conceal the embarrassing blue color. "Say, Ajax," Karns said, "did you pull him in?"

"Ask Lady Bangerly," Fred said, smiling expansively.

"Did he?" Karns inquired.

Lady Xenia gulped and nodded. Anger had vanished from her face,

to be replaced by confused wonder. "But how?" Karns continued, his pencil racing over the pad.

"With that little item over there, friend. The Ajax Skin-of-Delight Lamp. My own invention, guaranteed to make every lady look her loveliest. And you can quote me on that."

"Lady Bangerly, I'll bet you're thankful to Mr. Ajax," Karns said brightly. "How about a statement?"

"Why . . . why yes . . ." she stammered. Ajax watched her, seeing her obvious confusion. "He . . . he saved the Bangerly Diamond with that Lamp—and captured that Edmund fellow . . . and, well . . ."

"Great!" Karns exclaimed loudly. "What a yarn! Ajax, you're going to be quite a public figure."

"You'll mention my lamp, won't you?" he breathed.

"Sure, sure. Some more particulars."

"Well . . ." Ajax began. "Let's go over and talk to Her Ladyship." They ambled toward the bed and Fred sat down in an extremely chummy fashion. "You'll endorse my product, won't you?"

"She ought to," Karns chuckled.

"Why, yes . . ." Lady Xenia breathed again, flustered. "I suppose . . . even if my ball was ruined . . . I suppose . . . you saved the diamond . . . yes . . ."

"More particulars," Karns insisted.

In the distance, a police siren shrilled through the night air. It was

a pleasant sound to Fred Ajax.

FRED Ajax stood gazing out of his office window, puffing leisurely, on an expensive cigar. He sighed contentedly, thinking of the recent system-wide publicity he had received in connection with saving the Bangerly diamond. Lady Xenia's endorsement of the Skin-of-Delight Lamp had helped considerably too.

Behind him, Fred heard Sailor laugh. "Boy, Lady Xenia sure is some looker with that improved lamp. But I remember a night on Ganymede. You shoulda seen her then . . ."

Fred turned, flicking ash from his cigar. "Tut, tut," he admonished Burns, "a woman is a woman under any circumstances. But you take money—lots of it—that opens up some delightful possibilities."

Sailor Burns grinned. "I see whatcha mean. Say, speaking of money, when you going to invent something new?"

"Plenty of time for that," Fred Ajax sighed, glancing at the pile of order blanks on his desk. Two hundred Skin-of-Delight Lamps sold already that morning. He puffed at his cigar. "Plenty of time," he said.

THE END

## ★ *Mystery Element* ★

THE story of the discovery of Helium by Ramsey, is an old tale in the history of chemistry. What gave it its unusual twist was the fact that before the gaseous element was found on Earth, it was located spectroscopically in the Sun. This was one of the miracles of applied physics.

The latest touch, exactly in reverse, has been the discovery of element number 43, Technetium. This extremely rare element actually was never "discovered" on Earth. Theoretically it had been assumed to exist, but until nuclear physics showed the way, science had never seen it. It was actually synthesized or "created" in a cyclotron a few years ago. That was the first contact with Technetium.

Then recently, spectroscopic observation of the Sun disclosed the

faintest traces of Technetium! In other words the Helium-process was done exactly in reverse. To date no quantities of Technetium have been discovered on Earth though undoubtedly they exist, probably masked by other elements.

Technetium is a radioactive element with a half life of the order of two hundred thousand years. Even if created in any quantity or even if discovered in any quantity, no practical use is known for it. But then that shouldn't be surprising for when Helium was first discovered, it too was regarded as useless. Now of course it is invaluable in applications ranging from welding to medical uses in diving and of course the use in lighter-than-air craft. Possibly Technetium will have a similar useful development.

★ ★ ★

# "HEY MA, WHERE'S WILLIE?"

By

*I. M. Bukstein*

**"No, sir, we wasn't fooled by them lights  
in the night sky. Illusionations, we call 'em.  
Funny though, Willie disappeared that night!"**

JUST where Willie went, I ain't sure. I wonder sometimes, especially around harvest because that's about the time we found Willie was missing. I should pine after him a little. He was my son, but somehow I never took a hankering toward Willie like I ought to. I got five other boys a lot smarter, bigger, and nicer to look at than Willie ever was, besides four girls that's as pretty as they come. But when someone disappears, like Willie did, even if you don't care particularly much you kind of wonder at times just how it came about.

Willie was near about fourteen or hereabouts. I never could remember for sure. He wasn't the oldest and he wasn't the youngest. But then with ten kids and ten ages to keep track of a man can't be expected to remember. Anyhow he'd be about sixteen now, since it was two years ago that it happened.

It was a bad time for him to be kipping off, too. We were in the

middle of harvest. We had corn to get in, besides which we had a bit of a scare around here with lights flashing in the hills and funny noises at night. The fellows who know call that sort of thing by some fancy name. "Mass illusionations," I guess they'd say.

Well, one night we sat down to chow. We'd worked hard all day, so we were filling ourselves as full as we could. Ma is a right good cook when she bothers, and the girls do all right by themselves. When we finished, Joey pops up. I think it was Joey. I can't rightly remember. When you got ten kids and ten names to keep track of you're bound to have a hard time remembering.

Anyhow, one of the kids pops up and says, "Look, Pa! Willie's plate is all full up with chow and no Willie."

Ma looks down the row and tallies them up. Sure thing, nine kids and no Willie. I kind of wondered why Willie wasn't around. He's us-

ually the first to eat and the last to stop. Ma looked worried.

"Well," I says. "Pass his plate. Don't want any food to go to waste." So, the plate is passed down to me. By the time it goes down the line of kids there's one porkchop left. I eat the porkchop and forget about Willie for a while.

Next morning, Joey comes up and says Willie wasn't home last night.

"So," I says. "Willie wasn't home last night. Where's breakfast?" Ma looks worried. Like I say Ma always liked Willie.

"OK, Ma," I pipes up. "We'll ask the neighbors. It'd be easy to spot Willie anywhere." That's what I figured. Even though I hate to say it about my own son, Willie was plumb peculiar to look at. He had a head that looked like it belonged on a man a hundred pounds heavier. It sat like a knob on the end of a scrawny, skinny body. A body too scrawny to be much use in farming.

HE sure was dumb too, that Willie. If you put him out to plow a straight line, he'd plow a circle. If you wanted him to plow a curve, he'd plow a zig-zag line. He wasn't like the other boys. Willie got kicked out of school when he was eight. Not that the other boys finished school, but he got kicked out real disgraceful-like. Now Bennie, he set fire to the teacher's chair; Joey burned down the whole school building. But Willie, guldurn Willie, he read all the books he could get

ahold of till he knew more than the teacher; so of course, the teacher had to kick him out to save her face. Take Willie to pull a trick like that. Asked her such fool questions that she had to close the school for a couple months to take a rest cure. That was Willie for you.

Sometimes I wonder myself why Willie don't mean as much to me as some of the other kids do. Maybe it's because I wasn't around when Willie was born. Just happened the draft, the war draft that is, called my number. That was for the second world war. Well anyhow they didn't want me. I guess the government didn't want to support my kids. Don't blame them though.

I go to the city and two weeks later I come back and there is Willie. He's just an ordinary baby, no hair and no teeth.

"Kinda homely," I says to Ma. But she doesn't seem to care, so I figure I don't care either.

Willie grew up and Willie kept getting in the way. Asked all kinds of silly questions. Sure, the others always wanted to know why the grass is green; but not Willie. Willie asks some silly question about "the relative merits of transistor amplifiers as compared to vacuum tubes." That ain't all the questions he asked. But you get the idea. Willie always acted kind of big for his breeches.

Ma always seemed to encourage him too. Keeps saying Willie ain't my son. I know she's kidding, of course. I reckon she means sort of

like, in spirit he ain't my son. In that respect, I agree with her. Willie sure ain't my son. Some of the kids titter when Ma says that. Especially Ellie, or was it Sue? We had another one of those "mess of illusions" about that time. Sue kept talking about funny looking men, with funny looking heads; wearing funny-looking clothes. She said they jumped out of a coffee saucer or something like that. Just a baby, you know, with crazy notions. I never do pay any attention to these crazy ideas the kids bring up. I once read a book or something, or maybe someone told me, kids always see things that aren't there. Just humor them and don't say nothing, so I don't say nothing.

WE had a couple more kids after Willie. Three I think it was. All nice strong babies. I remember once Willie asked where they came from. That was the only near normal question Willie ever asked. He found out quick enough without any help from me. Willie was like that. He found out all kinds of goofy things from Lord only knows where. Even kept telling me that it didn't matter at all what time of moon I planted the crops. Just a punk kid too big for his breeches. Been farming all my life and he's telling me:

To get back to the facts, we asked the folks around here if any of them had noticed the whereabouts of Willie. Someone said they'd seen

him in the cornfield near the Weston farm. At least, what used to be the Weston farm. The same night Willie disappeared someone or something rooted and burned his whole corn patch.

On the whole most people were too interested in the lights and noises they were seeing and hearing to pay any attention to Willie's getting lost. Ma missed Willie at first. He used to keep her company quite a bit. He was too scrawny to do outside work, so he used to help Ma in the house. But soon even Ma got used to the idea. Now she don't mention him no more.

Don't know why I'm telling you this. Maybe it's because you're new around here and I thought you might be interested.

Hey Ma! How about a fresh pot of coffee? This one's about gone.

About Willie now, it might be the time of year that makes me think about him. It's harvest time you know. The time Willie disappeared. Hey Ma, tell those kids to cut the noise out there. Can't hear myself think. Now where were we? Come to think of it, the kids are all in bed by now. Hard day harvesting.

Maybe I'd better check on the noise. Want to come along? Watch your head as you go out. The stoop is kind of low. I always bang my head if I don't stop to think about it.

Hey you! What you doing in my corn? Guldurn flying saucer or no guldurn flying saucer, that guldurn

thing is ruining my crop! Hey, there's some people or what look like people. Say, they remind me of Willie, big heads and scrawny bodies. Well, what do you know? It's Willie! Willie, where you been and where'd you get that get up? Tell those

things you're with to get the saucer thing off my corn. Just wait till your Ma sees you. She's been worried sick. Fine thing! Leaving us in the middle of harvest. Hey Ma! It's Willie!

THE END

# INTRODUCING the AUTHOR

★ *Mack Reynolds* ★

(Concluded from Page 2)

met Fredric Brown and Walt Sheldon who immediately took me under their literary wings.

Among other things they introduced me to Harry Altshuler their agent and a considerably better one than a tyro like myself could ordinarily hope for. Sales began rolling in. The Ziff-Davis magazines, the Standard magazines, *OTHE WORLD*, and then, when she started up, *IMAGINATION*. Fifty or sixty stories in the past two or three years to almost every magazine in the field.

Not so many shorts these last months since I've been concentrating on novel lengths for hard covers, but I still turn out an occasional one when I get an idea I particularly like. One of the novels, *THE CASE OF THE LITTLE GREEN MEN*, (Phoenix, \$2—advt.) was originally meant to be somewhat of a satire on both the detective and the

stf fields, but nobody seemed to recognize the fact. Maybe I was wrong.

Also managed to compile *THE SCIENCE-FICTION CARNIVAL*, an anthology of science-fiction fun, along with Fredric Brown, for Shasta. Should appear this Fall. I couldn't resist including one of my own, of course, and picked *The Martians And The Coys* which appeared originally in *IMAGINATION*.

What am I doing now? Writing a serious science fiction novel which should take at least two years to complete. No wars of the future, no ray guns, extra-terrestrials, nor even time machines. It's going to be entitled *TOMORROW*—and I wish it could be finished by then! In the meantime I hope you like my story in this issue of *Madge*.

—Mack Reynolds



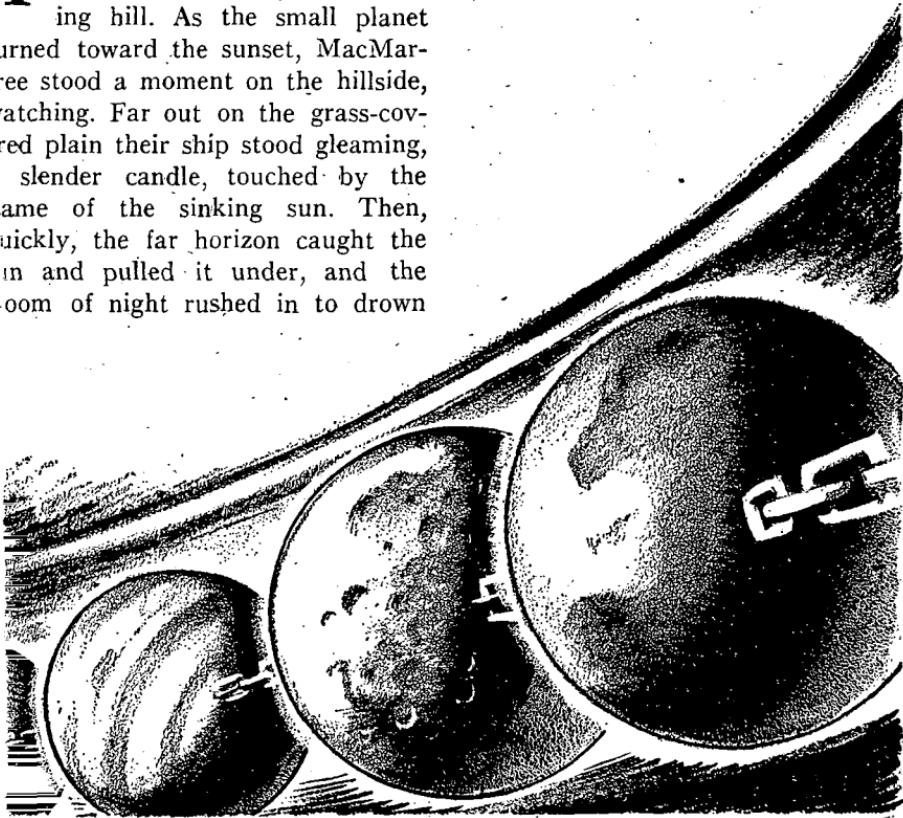
# PATROL

By

*Richard H. Nelson*

**MacMartree knew that Man was omnipotent—  
Master of the Universe. But could he expect his  
patrol to fight and conquer an invisible enemy?**

THEY made their camp high on the breast of the gently swelling hill. As the small planet turned toward the sunset, MacMartree stood a moment on the hillside, watching. Far out on the grass-covered plain their ship stood gleaming, slender candle, touched by the flame of the sinking sun. Then, quickly, the far horizon caught the light and pulled it under, and the doom of night rushed in to drown



the pale twilight.

"Night comes so fast here," Abner said, at MacMartree's side.

"Yes," MacMartree agreed, turning to him. "And day comes even faster. Time for sleep now, with morning only four hours away."

"I can't get used to it," Abner said as they moved back into the camp area. "Sleeping and waking in four hour bits!"

MacMartree laughed at that. "Abner, you're getting old. You can't adapt anymore."

Abner laughed, too, and unrolled his sleep-kit for the night.

MacMartree walked to the place where Phillips and Cole lay on the ground, talking casually and watching the stars.

"Time to switch on the screen, Phillips," MacMartree reminded the younger man.

Phillips nodded, sat up and reached for the control box that lay on the earth beside him. He closed the circuit, and the force-screen bloomed around them, glimmering softly like a thin veil of glowing fireflies.

"Kind of useless, that, don't you think?" Cole asked.

MacMartree sat down beside them.

"It's one of the rules, and no patrol ever came to grief by following the rules."

Phillips lay back on the turf. "No patrol ever came to grief at all, you mean. I'm bored to death."

MacMartree smiled tolerantly. "I know. It's a quiet life."

Abner came over and joined them, completing the party. "What're you three up to?" he wanted to know.

MacMartree yawned. "They're trying to get me to argue with them, as an excuse for not sleeping."

"Not a bad idea, either," Cole grinned.

"You youngsters will be the death of me," MacMartree complained. "Don't you know an old man needs his sleep?"

"Come on, Mac," Phillips teased. "Tell us why the patrols are necessary."

THEY all laughed then, and MacMartree grinned. "I know how it is with you young ones," he said. "You're tired of the dull and safe life back home and joined the Service, only to find it just as dull and safe as anything else."

"Tell me," Phillips put in, "can anything happen to us anymore?"

"Yes," Cole said. "We can die of old age."

It didn't take much. The three young men had known it wouldn't take much to get MacMartree started . . . it seldom did.

"Youth never fails to amaze me," he said. The younger men recognized it as a preamble, and settled themselves comfortably in the warm darkness to listen.

"Look at you now," he went on. "You complain that your life here on Patrol is tedious and uninteresting. Nothing ever happens, you say

And it means nothing to you that the dangers and misfortunes you talk of never threaten you because you have been given the power to prevent and cope with anything."

He sat up now, warming to his subject. "You take no pride in your heritage. Man is completely sufficient unto himself, and beyond that. There is an old word I have found in my reading . . ." He paused, trying to remember.

"Omnipotent," he said at last. "Man is omnipotent."

"All-potent?" Abner asked. "All powerful?"

"That's right . . . it's an archaic word, but it fits," MacMartree told them. "But you don't appreciate your power, because you don't realize what your life would be without it."

"In my books, I've read of the things our species suffered, before our knowledge reached fulfillment. When we were bound to Earth, there were wars; men—killed one another."

The young men shook their heads, wondering at the folly of their kind many thousands of years before.

"And there were other things, too. As we cut ourselves loose from Earth, and burrowed into the farthest reaches of the Galaxies, looking for new worlds like this one, there were terrible dangers, dreadful enemies and elements to cope with. And at first, man was foolish . . . continually meeting his enemies on their own ground. Until at last, our wisdom

prevailed.

"We devised ways and means to detect and destroy anything that endangered us, long before the danger could be manifested. Like here, on this planet . . . but you know about that."

"Radiation, wasn't that it?" said Cole.

"Yes," MacMartree said. "The discovery ship took its readings from out there somewhere, out where this place was only a dust mote in the glare of its sun. They drained off the radiation, scattered it into the void, then seeded the place with grass and went away."

"But that's what I don't understand," Phillips objected. "Why must we patrol? When the discoverers found this planet, they destroyed the only thing about it that could be harmful to man . . . so why must we be here?"

MacMARTREE shrugged. "Caution, boy . . . call it caution. We are here to see and observe. The discoverers do not accept their readings as infallible, though I suspect that they are. We're here on the one chance in a hundred million that somewhere on this little world, there's a being or an element, that might bear enmity toward mankind."

Abner sighed. "And so we patrol . . . for a year."

"Yes," MacMartree agreed. "For a year. And after the year, another patrol, and another year, and so on

through a hundred patrols and years, until the place is classified safe for colonization."

"I think my species is cowardly," Cole said, a trifle hotly.

"Cautious," MacMartree corrected gently. "Only cautious. It's as it should be . . . they have set up rules of caution, and we've never suffered for it."

"Except from boredom," Phillips cut in, and they all laughed again.

"Really though," said MacMartree, "you should be proud, not bored. Think of it, if the sun that just rolled down the horizon should suddenly begin to expand into a super-nova, it's within our ability to restore it to its normal status. Should a comet sweep this planet tonight and drag a tail of poisonous gases over us as we sleep, our force screen would protect us, and our mechanisms and devices would make the air sweet and clean for us in minutes. If—oh, but you know. Appreciate your power, your ability. Be glad you are what you are!"

The young men smiled in the darkness, because, of course, they were proud, and satisfied, and pleased with their own omnipotence.

MacMartree slept the sleep of the aged; curled in the clinging, billowy warmth of his sleep-kit. It took him a minute to rouse, when Cole came and shook him by the shoulder.

"It's Phillips," Cole was saying. "Come and see him, Mac, come and see."

"Eh?" MacMartree questioned.

"What about Phillips?"

"There's something — something wrong with him. I don't know . . . come and see, Mac!"

Abner lighted the lamp, and MacMartree blinked against the glare that flooded the area within the screen. Then, as his eyes grew accustomed to the brilliance, he saw what was happening to Phillips.

"You see?" Cole said, in great agitation. "Something is wrong with him."

As they watched, the stricken Phillips retched and vomited again. MacMartree's nostrils crinkled at the offensive odor of it.

"Throw a disposal over that," he directed Abner. The younger man went to his pack and returned with the disposal unit. One of the disposal wafers took care of the mess Phillips had made.

"What's wrong with him?" Abner asked, completely bewildered.

MacMartree searched his memory for the word. "Sick," he said at last. "Phillips is sick."

"Sick?" Cole echoed.

"What's that?" Abner wanted to know.

"I don't know, exactly. I've only read about it, in my books. A long time ago, men got sick, like this."

"But why?" Abner and Cole said it together.

"I don't know." He bent down over Phillips. "Are you going to do that anymore?" he asked.

Phillips looked up at him dully. "I . . . I don't think so," he said,

weakly and breathlessly.

"Lie back," MacMartree commanded. "Close your eyes. Sleep if you can. Maybe we can help you."

PHILLIPS nodded, lips bluish and tight, his whole face a ghastly pewter hue. He put his head down, eyelids fluttered shut. MacMartree regarded him in silence for several minutes.

"This could be what you've been wanting," he said at last to Cole and Abner.

"Wanting?"

"Something's happening, isn't it? Something we didn't look for. Maybe there's reason for patrols after all, eh?"

Cole frowned. "You mean . . ." He didn't finish it. He got up quickly, and strode to the scanner.

"Everything's all right outside," he said, after a moment. "Everything outside the screen is just as it was at sundown."

MacMartree shrugged. "Nothing com out there could do this to Phillips anyway. Nothing gets through the screen."

Cole returned and squatted down with the others. He picked up a handful of pebbles and began flicking them, one at a time, at the force-screen, watching them bounce back to the area.

"There's an explanation for this, course," MacMartree said, with tone of confidence he did not feel. The others nodded. After a time, Phillips' breathing grew more regu-

lar and he slept. As they watched, the rest of them saw the color creep back into his face, and sensed that he was better now. But still, it was a puzzling thing. Phillips had been . . . what was the word? . . . sick. According to MacMartree's histories, no man had been sick for the last thousand years.

They decided to return to their sleep-kits for the remaining hour of darkness, but they never got there.

Rising from his position beside the sleeping Phillips, Abner's long frame lurched suddenly forward. He sprawled at the feet of MacMartree and Cole . . . and both men heard the dull snap as Abner hit the ground, his left arm caught beneath his body.

MacMartree cursed. "Blast it, Abner, pick up your feet!" Then to Cole: "Is the bone-mending stuff here, or in the ship?"

Cole started to say that he had brought it along, all right, but he was interrupted by Abner's scream.

The sound of it rasped across their nerves. They stared down at the writhing Abner, their brains numbed by that horrible, entirely unfamiliar sound.

"What is it?" Cole questioned, finding his voice after a moment. MacMartree ignored him, kneeling beside Abner.

Abner's wind sucked into his lungs, and was expelled in another fearful scream. In spite of himself, MacMartree felt a prickling along the back of his neck . . .

"Abner," he said intensely, "Ab-

ner; listen to me!"

But the younger man was doubled in a knot of agony, screaming and screaming and screaming.

MacMARTREE struck him in the face, with his open palm at first, but when that did no good, with doubled fists, hard. Finally Abner's screams stopped. Then MacMartree tried again.

"Listen, Abner . . . can you hear me now?"

Abner's voice came twisting up, thin and quavery.

"I—hear you . . . yes, I hear you . . ."

"Your arm, is that what makes you scream? Your arm?"

"Yes, yes," moaning now . . . "yes, my arm . . . I want to die . . . let me die, please Mac, please . . ."

"Listen to me," MacMartree commanded fiercely. "Get hold of yourself and listen! This thing in your arm, it's a *hurt*. Your brain should be blocking it from your consciousness, but somehow it isn't. Do you understand me?"

"Hurt," Abner echoed. Then he began to croon it, as though there was something soothing in the sound of it: "Hurt, hurt, hurt in my arm . . ." He made a twisted little hymn of it, singing it over and over again.

"That's right," MacMartree was saying, "Your brain isn't killing the hurt, as it should. You must *think*, Abner, think of your arm, whole and

well, and with no hurt in it. *Think!*"

But Abner only repeated that ancient, awful word: "Hurt in my arm . . . hurt, *hurt* . . ."

MacMartree shrugged, and looked up at Cole, who was still standing helplessly by.

"Fetch the serum," MacMartree said. "I'll try setting the bone . . ." He grasped the twisted arm, as he spoke, and one, tearing, final scream broke out of Abner's throat. Before MacMartree could react, Abner went rigid in every limb, then as suddenly relaxed and was still.

"He's dead," Cole choked. "Abner is dead!"

MacMartree felt for the heartbeat, shook his head.

"Only unconscious. The hurt did that, I suppose." He sat back on his haunches, thoroughly baffled. Cole sat, too, and a few yards away, where they had left him, Phillips stirred. He rolled over on his side and propped himself shakily on one elbow, roused by that last, ringing shriek of Abner's.

"It isn't right," MacMartree said to neither of them. "The hurt, that went with sickness — a thousand years ago." He looked up at them.

"I read about these things, you see," he told them. "There was hurt and there was sickness. When they knew enough about the human brain, scientists simply bred into the part of our minds that make us aware of hurt the power to shut it off, automatically, before we're even conscious it exists. And as for

sickness . . ." He looked at Phillips, shaking his head. "They got rid of that, too, and now . . ."

Neither of the younger men said anything for a time. They waited, desperately relying on the older man to help them, to bring them through this, whatever it was; into familiar ground again. At length, Cole spoke.

"Mac," he began softly.

MacMartree looked at him, waiting.

"Mac, I . . . I feel something . . . I don't know . . . perhaps it's sickness . . . or hurt . . . I've never known those things . . ." He held forth his hands, and they were twitching and trembling.

MacMartree's teeth ground together. "Another obsolescent word I'll have to teach you," he said to them. "It is *fear*."

He went to work on Abner's broken arm, setting it and injecting the serum that would cause the fracture to knit in a matter of minutes. And as he worked, he tried to drive the nagging thought from his mind. . . . sickness for Phillips, hurt for Abner, fear for Cole . . . *what for MacMartree?* He was the oldest. He was leader of the patrol. Perhaps a little of *all* these horrors?

To keep his mind occupied, he counted off the required minutes for the serum to take effect. Then, when the time had passed, he gave the injured arm an experimental twist.

It flapped loosely at the break, as before, and Abner stirred and moaned behind the veil of his un-

consciousness.

The serum had failed. *Unheard of!*

**S**TRAIGHTENING, MacMartree felt his particular affliction engulf him. Anger, wild, unreasoning anger at this intangible, invisible enemy that tormented them so. Cursing, he scooped up the vial of serum, flung it to clatter against the shimmering force-screen. But it did not. It passed through the curtain which was suddenly nothing more than thinning mist . . . and then not even that.

"Weapons!" Macmartree cried, his voice a hoarse bellow. "Weapons and positions! Quickly!"

Phillips and Cole scrambled to obey. The three conscious men huddled back to back around the body of the unconscious one. Their weapons were small and unfamiliar in their waiting hands, and not the least bit reassuring. They waited for whatever it was that stalked them from beyond the ring of their glaring lamplight to come for them, battle with them, make itself known.

"MacMartree," Phillips whispered in the throbbing stillness.

"Well? Are you sick again?"

"No, no — I just thought . . ."

"Yes?"

"The screen, the serum . . . failing that way. What if . . . the *weapons* . . ."

A piece of eternity passed them by before MacMartree could make his lips form the command.

"Test — your weapons."

Nothing.

Tentatively, fearfully, the three squeezed the metal in their icy hands. *Nothing*. No rush of power, no leaping death to meet their adversary when it came. Their weapons, too, had failed them.

Behind him, MacMartree heard the racking sobs begin in Cole. He did not recognize them as sobs, but he sensed their meaning, and knew, of course, what caused them.

He also heard Phillips scramble to his feet, his wind sucking in and out of his throat in short, gasping shudders. He waited for Phillips to break and run into the darkness, fleeing in blind panic for the distant sanctuary of the ship on the plain below. But the darkness that surrounded them stared Phillips down, sent him grovelling back to the earth, a whipped and whimpering cur.

And then, MacMartree was alone. He had never felt so lonely in his life before. The three younger men were there, of course, but they, too, were lost in voids of aloneness. He envied the unconscious Abner, until he felt Abner stir slightly on the ground behind him, and then go tense with waking. So they were all to meet it, and be aware when it came.

But, such *loneliness*! Such a need he felt, for something to hold to, to reach for, to depend on. Another of their weapons? He knew better.

There had to be something, there

had to be. But what? Beaten, vanquished, he covered his face with his hands, and waited.

The little planet rolled steadily toward the sunrise, the cold stars glided above them. Quietly, the dawn breeze simpered among the grasses.

Quite slowly, MacMartree raised his head.

"Abner, Phillips, Cole . . ." They didn't answer, but he knew they heard him, and were listening, within their individual worlds of aching loneliness and fear.

"I . . . I know what our Enemy is," MacMartree said.

They came a little closer to him, then, venturing out of themselves a fraction to hear what he said.

"Our Enemy," MacMartree told them, "Is God."

AFTER a pause, the inevitable question came. Phillips voiced it for the rest.

"What is — God?"

MacMartree shook his head. "A myth — a legend — I thought. There were so many things in all those ancient books I read . . . how was I to know?"

"This is something you read, too?"

"Yes, in a very old book. In many of them, actually, but one in particular. A book called —" the name eluded him. He let it go. "God was a deity. People worshipped Him, thousands of years ago."

Cole had stopped his crying.

"The book was written as the Word of God. I — I remember a

part of it . . . ”

“Tell us,” dully, from Abner.

“I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.” I think that explains it best.” He sighed. “It’s my fault, I suppose. Man is omnipotent, I said. Man is all-powerful. Man can do *anything!* Yes, it was enough to rouse the anger of a jealous God.”

“Is He going to kill us, then?”

“I don’t know, Phillips. He could have, long before this . . . ”

“How can we fight Him,” Cole whispered. “How?”

“We can’t,” the old man said. “God is the only omnipotent One. We are not.” He got to his feet, came around to face them.

“One thing we can do.”

“What?” they wanted to know. “What can we do?”

“We can try to — talk to Him.”

The grassy world sped softly to-

ward its dawning. Beyond the hill that rose above them, lean fingers of light came creeping from the lifting sun. It seemed to come in answer to those stumbling, clumsy, fervent prayers — the first prayers that had touched the lips of men in a thousand years.

Lost in concentration, MacMartree felt the sweet breath of the sun’s first warmth upon his back. He opened his eyes, found them dimmed somehow, and a wetness on his cheeks:

Wonderingly, they looked at one another, awed by what they read upon each other’s faces.

“I forgot,” MacMartree said softly. “I forgot that He is also merciful . . . ”

Abner slowly raised his arm.

“It’s healed,” he said.

THE END

## ★ *Body Balance — In Space!* ★

THE U. S. Air Force in recognition of the things to come, maintains a special organization known as the Department of Space Medicine! This shows how seriously the government is taking the idea of Lunar travel! As Heinz Haber, a scientist with the group notes, there is no way to experiment with the first space flight — you’ve got to anticipate your problems in advance and solve them or there won’t be any flight.

And so in the laboratories they’re studying the effects of acceleration on the body; they’re calculating the effects of lack of gravity, and

they’re preparing for the supplies of air, food and water in a rocket.

The lack of gravity is not going to be the humorous thing it’s generally considered. The body will have a rough time adapting itself to this condition because of the sensitive balance indicator in the human ear. While we can’t duplicate the lack of gravity here on Earth save for very brief periods, we already have an idea that this is going to be a major problem of space-flight. Fortunately it will be possible to provide an artificial gravitational field by rotating the rocket and using centrifugal forces produced.

# THE COSMIC BLUFF

*By Mack Reynolds*

**As Earth's Champion, Jak had challenged the  
Invaders to a duel in the Arena. It was a grand  
bluff, but they called it—with one of their own!**



**T**O everyone in the Solar System I was a big shot, understand?

Everyone but two — the two that counted most. One of the two was Suzi, and the other was me. The difference was that Suzi made no bones about telling me I was a fake; in my own mind the knowledge was there but more or less subconscious.

On this particular occasion Suzi was standing in the center of the half acre living room of my new

penthouse on top the two hundred story Spacenter Building in Neuve Los Angeles. She had her hands on her hips and was glaring around at the furniture, the pictures, the statuary.

She said bitingly, "Jak, you're a phony."

"A what?" I complained. "Listen, Suzi, don't start calling me those prehistoric names again."

"A phony," she said, "a humbug, a four flusher, a quack, a faker . . ."

*Illustrated by Bill Terry*



She'd finally got to a word I knew. "Hey," I protested, "what's this all about?"

She indicated the portraits of me hanging on the wall. She pointed out the statuettes. She picked up a magazine and showed me the ad on the back page—me, endorsing a boomerang. I'd got a thousand credits for that.

She went over to the bookcase and pulled out a copy of "How I Became Champ" and the first volume of "Gladiator Technique". Both by me. That is, ghost written for me; but my name was on the cover. She indicated two or three other books I was cashing in on.

"You're a phony, Jak," she repeated. "You used to be a nice quiet fellow, actually more shy and retiring than was good for you. Now your head is swollen beyond bearing."

I was getting a little hot about this. For the past few months I'd been acquiring the habit of having people look up to me, admiring me, asking for my autograph, that sort of thing.

"Look here," I said. "Just because you've known me for years and just because for most of that time I've been chasing you, doesn't mean that the Gladiator Champion of the Solar System is a nobody." I finished with what I thought would be the clincher. "Let me tell you, there isn't one girl in a billion who wouldn't be glad to be in your shoes—engaged to Jak Dempsi."

IT was the clincher all right. She took her hands from her hips and folded them over her breasts and glared. "Oh yes there is," she told me. "There's exactly one girl who isn't interested in being engaged to you Gladiator Jak Dempsi. Me." she snapped.

I glared back at her. "Are you crazy?" I asked. "We're going to be married the day after tomorrow."

"That's where you're wrong," she snapped again. "I became engaged to a nice, quiet, thoughtful, second-rate gladiator. A mistake happened and he wound up Solar System Champion—and a stuffed shirt. The engagement is off."

"Second-rate gladiator . . ." I blurted indignantly, but she was already on her way, stamping across the Venusian Chameleon rug to the door.

I was so surprised I stood there, letting her go. It took me a full minute to understand that Suzi had just run out on me. *Me!* The victor at the Interplanetary Meet. The sole survivor of the scores of gladiators who fought it out once every ten years to see which planet of the System would dominate interplanetary affairs.

I went over to the bookcase and wrenched out one of the many books on prehistoric times that Suzi was always insisting I read. That's Suzi's bug, if you didn't know. Prehistoric times, customs, history, language, legends—all of a period that most people don't even know ever

existed, and don't care.

The book was "Glossary of Ancient Terminology." I thumbed through it and finally found my words.

"Stuffed shirt!" I yelped indignantly "A *stuffed shirt!* Me?"

TEN minutes later I was in the Gladiator Room of the Spa-center Building and already had three or four slugs of *woji* under my belt.

"A stuffed shirt, yet. Me! Solar System Champ." I grunted sarcastically and made with a curt flip of my hand to the bartender. He was a Venusian spiderman, who of course, make the best barkeeps in the System.

"Another *woji*," I ordered.

A guy drifted down to me from the other end of the bar. "Hanging one on, Champ?" he asked. "You must be out of training."

I looked him up and down. I'd never seen him before. However, in my position you have to be nice to the fans.

I said, "Wojo doesn't bother me. I *train* on it." Suzi's words were still burning. I added, out of the side of my mouth, "If you really got it, you got it, and if you haven't you haven't and all the training in the world won't give it to you."

I flexed my muscles. "Wojo isn't going to hurt a man like me."

He blinked in admiration. "Guess you're right at that, Champ," he said. "It's the second-raters that

have to be watching everything they eat, everything they drink, everything they do."

"Right," I told him, condescendingly.

He climbed up on the stool next to me.

"Have a *woji*?" I asked him. I was glad to have his company; at least it'd keep my mind off Suzi.

"No thanks," he said, shuddering. "But I wouldn't mind a *bloor*."

So I ordered him a *bloor* and another double *woji* for me.

My new friend said hesitantly, "Champ, what'd 'ya think of these visitors, explorers, or whatever you want to call them, from Centaurus?"

How is it that when you become a celebrity—no matter in what field—your opinions on every subject seem noteworthy to everybody else? I'd read a little about the Centaurians, seen an item or two on the viziscreen, but I didn't know anything about them worth mentioning. I was too busy with my own rapidly developing affairs to spend much time keeping up with Solar System news.

"What about them?" I asked, noticing that my tongue was at last beginning to get a bit thick. I ordered another drink. The bartender started to protest, but then shrugged six of his shoulders and began mixing it.

"Didn't you hear the latest?" the guy asked. "They're looking for room for colonization and the Solar System attracts them."

It was shortly after this that the fog rolled in, and it didn't roll out again until the following morning when my manager gave me a de-alcoholizer.

**H**E was hopping mad. And when I say hopping mad I mean just that since Mari Nown, my manager, is a chicken-headed Mercurian *Bouncer*. A nationalized citizen of Terra, of course, but a Mercurian with all their characteristic excitability.

When my head cleared, he was jumping up and down in front of me and waving a sheet of newspaper he'd torn off the recorder on the viziscreen.

"Simmer down," I told him. "My head still aches, and besides, I can't understand what you're yelling about." I added nastily, "In fact, I can't understand how anything could happen that you'd yell about. All you do is sit around and let ten percent of everything I make roll into your pockets. You're probably the richest gladiator manager in the system and—"

He stopped hopping long enough to fix me with a beady eye. Finally he became coherent. "And that's exactly what I want to remain!" he shrilled. "You stupid *makron*, what're you trying to do, get yourself killed?" He waved the news sheet again.

I began to catch on to the fact that I must have done something the day before while under the influ-

ence of—ugh, I couldn't even think of the word without my stomach churning.

"All right," I said. "What is it? I don't remember."

He was prancing again. "You don't remember! I'll say you don't remember! If you did, you'd be hiding under the bed."

That got to me. I raised up indignantly. "Hiding under the bed? Me? I don't have to hide from *anything*. I'm champ!"

"That's pronounced *chump*," he whistled nastily. He tossed me the news sheet.

The headline read. *Interplanetary Champ says issues between Solar System and Centaurus should be settled in the arena.*

"Did I say that?" I said interestedly. "When?"

He was almost hopping again. "To that cub reporter in the Gladiator Room, you stupid *makron*!"

"Don't swear at me," I growled. "I didn't know he was a reporter. Besides, what're you so excited about? Maybe it'd be a good idea."

"Look at that next head," he shrilled.

It read: *Centaurians accept challenge of Jak Dempsi.*

"Hey," I said, "that ought to be quite a fight. Who do you think we'll have representing the Solar System? A *Slaber* from Jupiter would be a good bet. He—"

There he went again. He screamed, "Of course! Of course, a *Slaber* would be best, but you're the champ—"

*pions! A stupid idiot—but champion!"*

I gaped at that, then let my eyes go down to the news account. He was right. As champion, I was scheduled to meet the Centaurian gladiator. On the outcome would depend the fate of the System.

"Well," I said slowly. "Guess it makes sense at that. I *am* the best gladiator in the System."

He closed his little bird eyes in anguish.

I added, "As a matter of fact, I could use the exercise. I haven't had a meet in months." I eyed him accusingly. "What kind of a manager are you? Here I am, Solar System Champ and you haven't got me a fight since I won the Interplanetary Meet. The biggest drawing card in—"

He'd got to the point where he was so mad he wasn't hopping any more. Just breathing real deep.

He said, "The reason you haven't had any meets since you became champ is because I'd rather have a live champ making a good living endorsing Callipso Snak-goat Cheese—and me getting ten percent—than I would have a dead champ."

"What'd'ya mean?" I scoffed. "Nobody gets killed in an exhibition match." I flexed my muscles. "Besides, I can take care of myself up against any earth-side gladiator after—"

He glowered at me. "Anybody who killed the champ, by accident or otherwise, in an exhibition match,

would have a nice reputation for himself. *You* might go into the arena with the idea of not killing your opponent, but would *he*?"

I shrugged uncomfortably. "I can take care of myself—"

"Look," he shrilled, "let's go back over a little recent arena history. Less than a year ago you were a second-rater fighting at the state fairs. You went to Mars to watch the Interplanetary Meet which is held once every decade to decide interplanetary affairs. The ship carrying Terra's gladiators was lost in space and you were tossed in as an emergency replacement."

"Sure," I said. "The first time a Terran ever won an Interplanetary Meet."

He whistled disgustedly, "The first time a Terran ever lasted more than five minutes."

"Well?" I said proudly.

He pointed a few fingers at me. "BY A FLUKE! By using a lot of ideas you got from that quotation spouting girl friend of yours, you won by a fluke! Among other things, you *played possum*, as you called it, under a heap of corpses until all the others were either killed or wounded and then got up and finished them off. The fans throughout the system are still screaming about that."

"Well, I'm still champ," I said truculently. "I licked them once, and . . ."

"Aw, shut up," he shrilled. He whirled about and started for the door. "I'll see what I can do."

I didn't know what he meant by that, but I shrugged and rang for my breakfast. The twinge of conscience I felt inside, I manfully suppressed. I suppose that I really knew he was right, but I'd been getting a good deal of ego-boos the past months and it was hard — almost impossible, in fact — not to listen to it.

By noon the dealcoholizer had completed its work and I felt more or less normal. I suppose I should have been worrying about the bout with the Centaurian, but I wasn't. Not particularly. I was worrying about Suzi.

Suzi worked for a chain of publications as a female sports reporter covering the gladiator meets from the woman's angle. What she wanted to do was write books about primitive culture, and for years that had been the barrier between us. She couldn't stand the fact that I wasn't particularly interested in the ancients and spent half the time we had together in trying to fill me with the lore she thought the big interest in life. She'd even given me my professional name, explaining that the original Jak Dempsi was one of the outstanding gladiators in ancient times.

At any rate, I knew where she usually had her lunch and made my way there, hoping to be able to patch things up. She'd promised to marry me, after I'd won the championship for Earth, and if there was anything I could do about it, I was going to

see her hold to the engagement.

The Interplanetary Viziscreen Service, the I.V.S., occupies a building in Neuve Los Angeles nearly as large as Spacenter. Almost all of the I.V.S. people eat in the Auto Cafe, and it was there I made my way.

Soft music was playing as I entered and looked over the three acre expanse of tables. Of course, I didn't have to check them all—Suzi always sat in the sport section with perhaps a few hundred others.

The soft pleasant dining music cut off abruptly and the autorch started blaring out an earsplitting tune that brought back enough of my headache to make me grimace.

Several thousand heads came up and looked toward the entrance where I stood. A movement started somewhere or other and before you knew it, everybody in the place was standing on his feet and slapping his hands like crazy.

Everybody but two.

I could spot them now. Suzi and Alger Wilde were sitting at a table in the sport section. I made my way toward them.

ALGER Wilde, I might as well explain here, is a *makron* from the word *glorm*, if you'll pardon my language. He's been trying, in his smirking way, to get in with Suzi for almost as many years as I have, and until I won the championship was doing at least as well as I. His strong point was the fact that he was even further around the corner

in regard to the ancients than was Suzi. They could sit and talk for hours about the primitive comic books and other cultural matters that the average person had no interest in whatsoever.

I still didn't know what all the clapping was about, and I still didn't like the raucous music, but I ignored it all and made my way toward their table, rehearsing to myself what I was going to say to Suzi.

When I got nearer, the two of them, self-consciously, also came to their feet and both made with feeble applause to the extent of clapping their hands together once or twice.

I said, "What goes on here?"

We all sat down—with me congratulating myself that Suzi didn't object—and Suzi, her eyes shining, gushed, "Oh Jak, isn't it wonderful?"

I said, "I guess so. What?" I looked around the room in irritation. "What's all the noise about? I can hardly hear ourselves talk."

Alger Wilde said stiffly, "It's the new anthem, *The Solar System Forever*. Very patriotic. It was just completed by a staff of more than three hundred of the System's outstanding musicians. I understand that it's being played on every viziscreen on nine planets and twenty satellites. On order of the governments of all Solar System League members, the musicians rushed it through."

"It sounds like it," I growled. At least everybody had sat down again and were eating their lunch.

The stars were still in Suzi's eyes. She said softly, "It's dedicated to you, Jak."

"Huh?"

Alger Wilde bit out, "Why'd you think everybody was clapping? You're the hero of the System." He added, barely audibly, "They know not what they do."

It was beginning to dawn on me. My mind had been so full of Suzi that I'd almost forgotten about the Centaurian fight.

Suzi cast her eyes down to the table and said softly, "I'm sorry about yesterday, Jak: When I heard about your heroic challenge I realized how wrong I was."

I scowled and said, "I didn't exactly challenge them, just suggested that the whole thing ought to be settled in the arena. Maybe a *Slaber* or a *Saturnian gladiator*, or—"

Alger said, satisfaction oozing, "But you're the Champ, Jak."

And Suzi gushed, "So you'll certainly have the honor. Oh, Jak, our engagement will have to be postponed until after the fight."

**T**HREE was a gleam in Wilde's eye. He said, "And after the fight the marriage can take place. Only the brave deserve the fair, and, to the victor belongs the spoils, as the ancients used to say."

I knew what he was thinking. If I was killed in the arena, he'd be back in the running for Suzi: I growled, "What the *kert* do you mean by that, Wilde?"

Suzi placed her hands over her ears. "Please, Jak, your language."

Alger Wilde said indignantly, "Yes, what the hell is the idea talking that way before Suzi?"

I said disgustedly, "I'll be a *makron*"—she covered her ears there, too

—“if I understand how you two figure. I say *kert* and you're shocked. Five seconds later Wilde says *hell*, an ancient word meaning practically the same thing, and it's all right.”

Wilde said indignantly. "It's an entirely different matter, *Hell* is now a scholarly word, and quite acceptable. Of course, in ancient times it wasn't and when a cultivated person wished to use a strong expletive he said *Hades*, which was still a more ancient word meaning the same thing. Using the scholarly expression made it all right."

"I give up," I said and turned to Suzi. "Let's get out of here. I want to talk to you."

She said demurely, "Yes, dear."

I grunted a goodbye to Wilde and arose. There was applause again and the autorch started blaring *The Solar System Forever* as we left.

"You could get awfully tired of music like that," I said.

Suzi said, "Not me, Jak."

The usually crowded street outside the I.V.S. Building was curiously empty, but I didn't pay much attention. I was trying to figure out some way of talking Suzi into marrying me before the fight, so it was several minutes before I noticed what was out of whack.

A hundred yards before us, a hundred yards behind us, and across the street, were several scores of white uniformed officers, Solar League police, clearing the pedestrians, and even vehicular traffic from our way.

I started to say, "What goes on here any—"

But Suzi looked at me soulfully and said, "Your guard of honor, Jak. There's been some talk that the Centaurians might try to get at you before the meet."

To quote one of Suzi's favorite primitive exclamations, *Oh, Brother.*

"Look," I said. "I can't talk to you in front of all this. I feel like a parade. Let's go into a theatre, take a box and have this out."

Suzi wasn't disagreeing with anything today.

WE entered the theatre and made our way as quietly as possible toward a sound-proof box where we could be alone.

Suddenly, the three dimensional figures on the stage faded, the lights went on and the autorch started blaring that confounded tune again. Everyone in the theatre turned, spotted us and arose and began whistling and clapping.

I winced, but Suzi seemed to be in her glory. I hurried her along and we entered the enclosed box where at least we couldn't hear them—after I'd turned off the sound device.

Finally, the lights went out again. Instead of resuming the play, how-

ever, we had a flash of the face of the President of Terra. He spoke very seriously, very earnestly — and I had to sit through it after Suzi had switched on the sound again. He pointed out at some length that we all must maintain faith and calm and hold in our hearts the image of the champion of the Solar System, our own Terran Gladiator, Jak Dempsi.

The President's face faded and was replaced with a still' of mine.

The audience rose to a man, faced our box and applauded like crazy. I had a sneaking suspicion that the show wasn't going to go on as long as Suzi and I were there.

I said, "Let's get out of here before that autorch—" but I was too late. It started blaring *The Solar System Forever* before we reached the door. Everybody was singing too, which made it worse. I hadn't known before that it had words.

Otherwise, it was a successful evening. Particularly after I convinced the Solar System League officers that there was no need for around a dozen of them to be stationed in my apartment. I told them that they could patrol the corridors, my roof, and the street outside to their hearts' content, but my apartment was out. The officer in charge took another look at Suzi and evidently decided I was probably right — there are things more important than personal safety.

The rest of the evening was spent by Suzi proving that she still loved me. She offered some excellent evi-

dence. Anyway, it satisfied me . . .

I WAS awakened again the next morning by Mari Nown who, as he had the morning before, was waving a sheet of newspaper before my eyes. This could grow into a very unpleasant habit.

But at least he wasn't hopping this time. In fact, he seemed quite pleased with himself.

I turned over on my other side and growled, "Go away, I was having a beautiful dream about Suzi."

He whistled happily, "I've done it for you, Jak. Everything'll be fine now."

"That's good," I began sleepily, but then I sat upright in bed, with quick suspicion. "You've done what?" I grabbed the newspaper from his hand. It read, *Champ's Manager reveals he has Venusian Elephantiasis*.

I stared at it and then at him. "What in *kert* is Venusian Elephantiasis, and where'd you get the idea I have it?"

He shrilled proudly, "I had to do a lot of research. It's one of the few diseases left in the system that's incurable. So rare, for one thing."

I was still half asleep. I shook my head.

He said, "Don't you get it? You won't have to fight now. You can retire from the arena, as undefeated champ, and make a top notch living for the rest of your life endorsing—"

I jumped out of the bed and dashed to the telo, but even before I could reach it it glowed on and Su-

zi's face, cold as a winter day on Pluto, was there.

Her eyes seemed to focus about three feet beyond my head and she said, "Jak Dempsi, you're a phony. A cheap, petty, *cowardly* phony. Venusian Elephantiasis, indeed!" Her voice dripped scorn. "I never want to hear from you again."

"*Suzi*, wait a minute. I can explain," I yelled. "My manager—" But the screen had died.

I spun on him, but he wasn't at the side of the bed where I'd seen him last. Instead he was over at the Viziscreen, the glee gone from his chicken-like face, and anxiety beginning to become evident.

He shrilled, "They can't do this to me. We're being robbed!"

I STARTED for him, my fingers stretched out like claws. Here was one Mercurian *Bouncer* who was going to have his neck wrung, like the fowl he resembled.

Something in his attitude stopped me. I came up beside him and growled, "What now, you *makron*?"

He pointed at the news sheet which had recorded the item.

*Forty-three thousand Solar System scientists working on cure for Venusian Elephantiasis.*

He shrilled despairingly, "They'll have you cured in days."

I snorted, "Especially since I haven't got it in the first place. Listen, what gave you the idea I wanted to get out of this fight, anyway? I'm not afraid—"

He started hopping at that. "You're not afraid! You're too stupid, too conceited to be afraid. I'm afraid, understand? I'm your manager; I know how good a gladiator you are, and I'm afraid. I'm afraid first that you'll get killed and I'll lose the best thing I've ever had, but even more than that I'm afraid that this Solar System isn't going to be fit to live in after you lose this fight and the Centaurians take over."

I growled truculently, "I can whip anybody in the Solar System and I can whip—"

He flung two of his wing-arms up in despair. "We have *Slabers*, we have fast moving Spidermen, we have four armed Martians; but who do we get to represent us in the most important gladiatorial fight in history? A second-rate, inflated, balloon headed—"

"Hey . . ." I protested indignantly.

But he'd stopped of his own accord and clicked his heels in the Mercurian version of snapping of fingers in sudden inspiration.

"Look," he whistled. "If they can put forty-three thousand scientists to work figuring out a way to cure a disease they think you have, why can't they put ten times that number—a thousand times—to work on some new weapons you can use against this Centaurian *makron*?"

I scowled at him, not getting it. "You know better than that. In the arena the only weapons allowed are primitive ones, swords, spears, bat-

tle axes, boomerangs—”

“Yes, yes,” he shrilled excitedly, beginning to hop again. “But this is different. They—the Centaurians—don’t know that.” He clicked his heels together again. “It’s the solution! We’ll devise, in the next month, some sure thing weapon. You can’t lose!”

But I was worried more about Suzi than about the fight. I growled at him, “I don’t need anything but my short sword. All I want to be sure about is that I’m in that fight, see? If I’m not I’ll never see—”

But he was already darting for the door.

WELL, within the week the scientists had “cured” me of the disease that Mari Nown had dreamed up. I was scheduled for the fight again.

But no word from Suzi. And no way of getting in touch with her. I tried everything, but Suzi just wasn’t having any of me.

We started my training, and it became more or less of an Earth-wide secret that the scientists were fixing me up with some secret weapons which would guarantee the victory. Most of the sportswriters who came to the training camp were tight lipped and disapproving about it — not quite playing the game, you know—but the governmental big shots who were trembling in their boots over the Centaurian threat, made it clear that anything was going to go to insure Solar System victory. So the re-

porters didn’t print the stories they might have.

Except for Suzi.

Evidently the word got back to her about the weapons I was learning to use, and she let loose at me in her column. Nothing that the Centaurians would understand, of course, but the digs were there. She made it pretty clear that Jak Dempsi was a phony and that only with the use of unsportsmanlike weapons would he consent to go into the arena at all.

She had some nasty comebacks, because sentiment was running pretty high throughout the League planets, and anybody saying a word against the Champ was apt to find himself mobbed. They were frightened, understand? The whole Solar System was frightened, and they couldn’t bear the thought that I was less than their saviour.

But Suzi kept it up. She was the only sports reporter in the system who dared point out what they were all probably feeling.

The great trouble in the training was that we hadn’t the vaguest idea of what the Centaurians looked like. Their tremendous ship, several times the size of the greatest of ours, hovered motionlessly over Krishna-Krishna, the Venusian capitol city, but thus far not one of them had been spotted. They communicated with us, blank-screened, and we had nothing to go on to decide whether or not they were humanoid, or even if they were air breathers, although

the latter would seem likely if they wished to colonize the Solar System since all our life forms are based on oxygen.

The only thing was to provide me with several weapons, one each for the various different types of creature our Centaurians might be. In fact, it was only by dint of argument that I was allowed to take my short sword with me into the arena when the day finally arrived. The managers who'd had my training in hand wanted to use the space and weight the sword would take up to carry another half dozen atomic grenades.

I growled at them. "Listen, if these grenades are going to work—and how the *kert* they could possibly fail to work, I don't know—one of them will do the job. I'll take my sword along if only for a good luck charm; I've never been in an arena without it yet."

And I added sarcastically, "This is going to be some fight, this is. I feel like a murderer."

I kept the sword.

NEEDLESS to say, the amphitheatre was packed. Tens of thousands must have pauperized themselves for fare to Venus and for the highly priced seats. But whatever the cost, the stands were packed beyond belief. And, of course, throughout the system every man, woman and child, every brim, mador and loet, every—but you get the idea. Every intelligent living thing in the

Solar System was glued to his vizi-screen.

— And above the arena floated the Centaurian ship, silent, sinister.

There were no preliminaries. That would have been too much.

— Instead, when the moment of conflict arrived, I came out into the arena—staggered, might have been the better word. I had a burden of weapons that was just about all I could carry.

When the stands first saw me enter, they came to their feet and began a cheer that should have echoed and reechoed—but didn't. It died almost before it began. When they saw my equipment, the cheer faltered, then died in shame.

They realized, those citizens from all over the Solar System, what was happening. The stakes were too high. The Solar System was trading honor for security. Instead of being armed with the traditional sword or spear, battleaxe or boomerang, I was laden with the most deadly devices our scientists could develop.

As I said, the cheers died almost before they began.

Maybe I flushed a little. I don't know. But I tightened my jaw. At least they didn't boo. Everyone in the stands knew the issue; however he writhed in shame there must be no indication to the Centaurians that we weren't playing the game, that we weren't living up to our own rules.

I stood, my back to the judge's stand, and waited. To the left was

the sports box, and I could make out Suzi, even at that distance. Her face was expressionless.

A great helicopter suddenly and deftly detached itself from the Centaurian ship and gracefully swooped down. It was beautifully handled, settling to the opposite side of the arena as gently as a butterfly.

A large door in its side opened, the Centaurian emerged, and a gasp from the stands went up; a gasp louder than the cheer that had originally greeted me.

Of all Solar System intelligent life forms, Jupiter's *Slaber* is by far the largest, and, for that reason, that and its natural armor shell, Jupiter had been winning the Interplanetary Meets two out of three times for centuries.

But this hulking brute made the *Slaber* seem a babe in arms. It resembled somewhat a six legged turtle, roughly twice the size of a Terran elephant. It had two lobster-like claws and four other limbs:

EVIDENTLY, it had decided to end the battle as quickly as possible, because without either salute or warning it headed for me, the dust churning up behind it as it came. Its legs were short but fantastically fast. They seemed a blur of speed and before I had got over the surprise of its appearance it was half way across the arena toward me.

A shout, almost a moan, of warning went up from the stands, and suddenly those citizens of the Solar

System were no longer ashamed of the weapons I carried, no longer contemptuous of my honor.

I grasped my atomic grenade from its hook on my belt, dropped the projectile thrower to the ground to give my arm free play, and threw.

Half the total acreage of the arena went up in a gust of dirt, dust, gravel and colored smoke. Seconds later I had been thrown prostrate by the blast. Probably half the amphitheatre's occupants had been similarly treated, and how many blast casualties might have been among them, I couldn't know.

But at least, I thought, the fight was over and I'd done the Solar League's dirty work for it. I'd never be able to hold up my head again in a circle of gladiators, but the System was safe.

I came to my feet and turned to go.

A shout, incredulous, unbelieving, arose from the stands, drowning out the cries of those wounded by the blast of my grenade.

I spun and stared.

Crawling laboriously over the lip of the crater my grenade had caused was the Centaurian. One of his many limbs seemed limp and useless, and his shell was battered and begrimed, but he was still alive, and not too much the worse for wear.

When it got to level ground again it seemed to pause momentarily, seeking me out.

I grabbed up the heavy submachine gat—as Suzi tells me they

called them in the old days — and threw it to my shoulder. The projectiles it threw were only half an inch in diameter but each of them packed a charge of atomic explosive.

I TRAINED it and held the trigger down. The two hundred round drum was exhausted in less than a half minute, and the sound of the projectiles exploding against the shell of my foe was ear shocking in intensity. Once again, a cloud of smoke and dust enveloped the Centaurian. And only after the last cartridge had been expended and the submachine gat now useless, was the sigh of relief that went up over the stands audible.

But through the smoke, of a sudden, charged the six legged Centaurian and my eyes almost bugged out of their sockets. He was seemingly not further injured.

I dodged quickly to one side, stumbling over the gat I'd thrown away, thinking the fight over, and it uselessly empty. It was only the stumbling that saved me. I rolled to the side and it was past me and spinning about for another attack.

The Centaurian growled in a thunderous voice, "And now the fight begins, Terran *makron*." Its bulk evidently was no indication of a lack of intelligence. It had already not only learned to speak Amer-English, but could swear in our language.

I had one more major weapon in my deadly arsenal. I whipped the blunderbuss-nosed, pistol-like device

from my belt and trained it. Even though shielded with my especially designed ear plugs, the subsonic sounds flowed over me, enveloped me, terrified me. What it was doing to the enemy I could only guess.

Shaking my head in an attempt to clear it of the desperate, soul shaking fears brought on by the subsonic vibrator, I stared in the direction of the Centaurian.

He seemed to be watching me, questioningly. And suddenly I understood that he was waiting for the weapon to work! He wanted to see what it was going to do.

*It wasn't doing anything!*

A quarter of a mile away, on the other side of the amphitheatre, and supposedly out of range, spectators were fainting in droves, literally thousands of them screaming or keeling over. But a few yards before me he stood unimpressed.

I swore and threw the thing down, ripped off the rest of the belts and equipment they'd foisted upon me and reached for my sword.

It dashed forward, extending a tentacle from its body that formerly I'd been unaware of. I swung desperately and the sword clanged against the limb. I darted backward, noticing a large dent in the cutting edge.

Like a flash one of the lobster claws snapped out at me, nipping a cut in my left side, just below the ribs. Had it been another six inches over, I would have been cut in half.

I DASHED to one side and it rushed past, stirring up a breeze as it went. How such a large creature could get up momentum so rapidly was a mystery to me.

I grated out one of Suzi's slogans to give myself courage. *The bigger they are, the harder they fall.* And then it came to me that the trouble was that if they're big enough perhaps they don't get around to falling at all.

It was about and after me again.

I stood in its path, sword in hand, waiting. A massive groan went up from the stands.

Just before it reached me, I darted forward, crouched low, and dashed under its belly. Here, if anywhere, was the soft spot. As I ran, I thrust desperately upward with all my strength, then I was suddenly completely under and beyond it.

I spun around and stood there panting and staring at the end of my broken pointed sword.

It turned too, as though looking to find my trampled body, and surprised that I'd survived. It was about thirty feet away, and seemingly resting.

Suddenly from its mouth gushed forth a stream of flame, reaching out for me.

It was only by the merest chance that my grenade-made crater was immediately behind me. I tripped again and fell backward, and the sheet of flame passed over me.

A sigh went up from the stands. Suddenly, over the ridge it came

tearing. Hoping, evidently, to catch me before I recovered from my fall.

It had miscalculated and passed a good six feet to my right. I sprung to my feet and dashed over in time to deal its tail a smashing blow—and to accumulate another dent in my blade.

At this pace, my strength was rapidly giving out, and his seemed as great as ever—but I was still quicker in that my size and build enabled me to turn, spin, dodge, more effectively.

He tried twice more to get me with his flaming breath, and both times I was able to avoid it by inches. Or nearly so, at least. I kept my life, though hair and clothes were singed.

I HAD worked my way, involuntarily toward the press boxes, and took time to shoot up a desperate glance in Suzi's direction. Her face had lost its coldness now; her lips were parted in fear.

Almost, I was able to smile. Suzi knew the signs—as did all the rest of the reporters—she'd seen too many meets not to know when a gladiator was using his last iota of strength and was on the verge of collapse. She knew—possibly even better than I—how long I could keep up this pace. And then—

Seeing her, recalled her way of finding a slogan, a quotation of the ancients, for almost every situation that arose:

And in the recalling one came to me!

*Meet fire with fire.*

The Centaurian was emerging from the crater where its most recent charge had taken it. I ran with what speed I could muster to the Judges' stand and grasped one of the sacred Venusian torches that flanked the Judges' bench. I turned then and sped toward the enemy in hopes of getting him as he climbed over the crater edge.

He saw me coming and tried ineffectively to scorch me with his flaming breath, but he was either growing weak, or had utilized all the fuel his body produced for the effort. The flame leaped out a mere six or eight feet.

Holding the torch in hand, I dashed straight at him. As I had hoped, one of the lobster claws darted at me. I leaped nimbly to one side, bounced up upon the claw and scampered up it toward the four glaring eyes. I thrust the torch out and into them, hearing as though from a great distance, the cheer of victory that went up from the stands.

Then sliding, falling, tumbling, I was on the ground again and hurrying as fast as possible from what I expected to be the painful, blinded throes of the thing.

I turned and stared. It stood there, watching me. Showing no signs of distress.

It rumbled, finally, angrily, "You can't fool me all of the time, Terran. Soon you will tire, then I will get you—"

Suzi's books came back to me

again. What was it I was trying to remember? I stood there panting, realizing the ridiculousness of standing exhausted in the middle of the arena and remembering odds and ends that Suzi had told me about the ancients.

And then, just as the Centaurian headed for me again, it clicked.

A silence had settled down over the crowd. Arena wise, through years of watching gladiatorial events, they knew my knees were sagging, my reflexes slowed, my muscles screaming protest.

I stood there, sword in hand, directly in its path—waiting. It had said, "You can't fool me all of the time, Terran."

And that's what had clicked.

*You can fool some of the people some of the time . . .*

**P**RAYING that I had strength enough left for this, I waited until it was nearly upon me, its lobster claws out-thrust, its six heavy feet pounding. Then I jumped, to one side, back again. I bounded high to the knee joint of the second limb on the left, as the Centaurian skidded to a halt. A second scrambling leap and I was on its back. Half on my feet, half on my hands, I scampered forward toward its head, even as several tentacles made their way gropingly toward me.

No, I wasn't looking for a soft spot for my now dull sword. I knew there wouldn't be any.

The tentacles were reaching, al-

most touching me, but I ignored them. I found the tiny door right behind its massive head. I was right! I found the lock and sprung it.

The door swung open and inside the tiny, leaded shielded compartment the little creature occupying it looked up at me fearfully.

I grasped it by the scruff of the neck and hoisted it out of its seat. The "Centaurian Gladiator" had stopped completely now.

I dropped to the ground and tossed the thing before me. It was about the size of, and looked considerably like a small Terran pig. It was pink, fat, and, as Suzi said later, cute. Right now I didn't appreciate its cuteness.

"Please," it squealed, "don't touch me. I can't bear being hurt!"

I kicked it where its hams would have been had it really been a pig. It squealed again and started out, hampered in its speed by its fat, running across the arena with me after it, giving it *kert* with the toe of my boot.

It dashed for the helicopter and I gave it one last kick as it scampered for the craft's door so that it flew the last four feet. In the background I could hear the crowd roaring like thunder.

In seconds, the helicopter had taken off and returned to the spaceship above. It was swallowed up and the Centaurian ship blasted off and away. Evidently, it wasn't waiting to see what the Solar System fleet would do when the farce was made known.

I turned, and for a moment stared at the robot the Centaurian had occupied. Then my injuries and fatigue caught up with me. The fog rolled in and I slumped to the arena sands.

I EXPLAINED later in the hospital room to the diplomats, the I.V.S. reporters, and the others. And I made the explanation as short as possible.

In the first place, how could a thing that big and awkward have handled the helicopter so gracefully? How could *any* organic creature survive the explosion of an atomic grenade? How could it breath fire? How could it stand a burning torch being thrust into its eyes?

But it was the quotation that had brought it all home to me. I suddenly realized I was being fooled—and another of Suzi's quotations came to mind. *This is a horse of another color.* Then it clicked in its entirety.

*The Trojan Horse*, I had thought, something is inside. It's a robot; a mechanical fighting machine, like the tanks of old.

Suddenly the diplomats and the reporters were gone and Suzi was there, the star dust in her eyes again.

Before she could speak, I told her, humbly, "You were right, Suzi, I am a phony. I'm no champ. I was scared to death out there; when I found that all the super-weapons they'd made for me were—"

"But, darling, you won!" She knelt beside the bed, but I turned

my head away.

"Won," I said bitterly. "Sure, by a fluke again. I won against a little half pint that could have been defeated by a child." I snorted in self-deprecation. "I wonder what the crowd out there is thinking. I enter the arena with enough weapons to depopulate a small planet, and it takes me half an hour to find out it's all a hoax."

She remained kneeling there, but it was another voice that said, "The crowd doesn't see it that way, Jak." It was Alger Wilde, who had entered with my manager.

"Of course not," Suzi insisted. "You didn't know what you were against, but you were in there all the time, taking on something worse than any gladiator in the System. — You proved yourself, Jak."

Alger went to the window and opened it. "Listen to this," he said grudgingly. From the distance I could hear the arena crowd singing *The Solar System Forever*.

Even Mari Nown was happy. It seemed as though the judges unanimously voted to make me Inter-

planetary Champ for the rest of my life. The situation was obvious. Terra couldn't afford to let anything happen to me now. As soon as I died, the next Interplanetary Meet would result in a new champ and a new change in the balance of power. Terra wouldn't allow me to fight—not even in exhibitions.

Mari Nown's chicken head beamed as he bounced back and forth on his heels. "You're going to live to a ripe old age," he shrilled happily, "and the most dangerous thing you'll ever do is sign endorsements for Venusian Salt Water Taffy." He added, more happily still, "And I'll get ten percent of everything you make."

"Everything but Suzi," I told him, sticking out an arm to encircle her.

Alger Wilde frowned. "You know, Jak," he grunted, "I think you're right about that music. *The Solar System Forever* is a raucous thing."

It was welling, ever louder, through the window.

"Oh, I don't know," I said as soon as I took my lips from Suzi's. "I'm beginning to like it."

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## Conducted by *Mari Wolf*

IT was the summer of 1939, and the other girl and I were swimming out toward the raft that lay a quarter of a mile offshore the beach at Laguna. It was a rather long swim for us—neither of us was in our teens yet and the tide swells were heavy that day. But we weren't thinking much about the difficulties of swimming. No, as usual we were discussing science fiction. We were both very new, very young sf fans . . .

But now Jean was backslicing. "We'll never have space ships," she said. "I know we've talked about them, and all of that, but there'll never be any."

"Why?" I said. I didn't think she was serious.

"Because they're impossible." She looked at me and then kept on swimming. "Maybe someday someone will invent a fuel that can lift a ship off the Earth—but even then space travel will be impossible. There won't be any way of keeping up the oxygen supply."

Until that afternoon Jean had

been a very ardent science fiction enthusiast. In fact, she was the one who had astounded her mother after school one day when she said, "Gee, I wish I knew *everything* about the fourth dimension!" But now she'd turned her back on all the ideas we'd been mulling over for so long. I couldn't figure out why.

"What's impossible—about it?" I said.

"Everything. The man on the radio said so," she said. "I was listening last night when some people were talking about space travel. And this man said we'd never have it. There'd be no way to keep the air fresh . . ."

She wouldn't change her mind. I tried all the arguments I could think of, including hydroponic gardens that would breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen. But Jean was convinced. We'd never have space travel.

Authority had said so. Authority—in the guise of some man on the radio—someone whose name she couldn't even remember.

Well, maybe she was right. Maybe we won't ever have space ships. But personally I'm betting on the probability that we will. After all, people once said we wouldn't have airplanes! And once upon a time the steam engine was a big joke . . . But maybe space ships will actually be impossible, for some reason we don't know of yet. Not everything that people have believed in has come about. No one yet has found the medieval alchemist's stone and succeeded in transmuting lead into gold. (Of course, they've transmuted uranium considerably, but that wasn't just what the alchemists had in mind.)

But even if we don't have space travel in the foreseeable future there's one thing I'm sure of, that it won't have been prevented just because a man said that it couldn't be done back in 1939.

Which makes me think of the latest attack on science fiction.

"Why read it?" some of my so-called sensible friends say. "It's just escape literature . . ."

That's one way to dispose of a subject—put a tag on it and then assign a value judgment to that tag.

It's been a rather unanswerable argument, though. For one thing, just what is escape literature? For another thing, once you've got escapism neatly pinned down and defined, what's wrong with it?

IT doesn't seem to me, at least, that the typical stf reader or fan reads merely to escape the unpleasant, dull, and/or frightening realities of the world of 1952 A.D. Of course, he realizes that there are other possible modes of life besides those of 1952 A.D., whether he'll ever have any first hand experience with them or not. He realizes that the world of today is very different

from that of yesterday, and that tomorrow will probably be just as different from today. And he's extremely interested in that theoretical tomorrow . . .

Of course, in one very basic way this person who is interested in the world of the future is definitely escapist. Perhaps he leaves the frightening reality of the present—the atom bomb with its threat of race destruction—for the even more frightening unreality of some future world, a world with bigger and more horrible wars, alien invasions, even the annihilation of entire solar systems. But it's still escape, in one way, for it presupposes that there *will be* a future—for a while at least.

But in one very important way the science fiction reader isn't an escapist at all, but a realist. He doesn't go back into the past. He doesn't cling to the comforting solidity of history—a solidity that is really an illusion that comes from seeing the past in retrospect, as unchangeable, fully known, thoroughly explored. (What solidity would there have been to the medieval peasants just before the year 1000, when they clustered together waiting for the world to come to an end?) No, the stf reader looks into a future that he knows is extremely flexible, because it will rise out of the present, and immediate future, and out of still more remote futures. And this future that he looks forward to can be affected by what is done today—perhaps even by what some reader will do, will invent, because he has read science fiction . . .

The science fiction reader realizes, first of all, that there are other ways of life besides that of 1952 A.D. He knows that the values of today are not necessarily the values of tomorrow. But he knows too, even if only subconsciously, that we

today, like all others, are time bound and culture bound. We live in this modern world and accept it, more or less. And we attribute our values, our beliefs, our mores and standards to the whole world, both now and in the past. And in the future.

We may dream of aliens—but we see them usually in the guise of Earthmen, or at least of Earth-like men. And the less Earth-like they are, the more BEM-like we usually picture them. To us, who are the norm, to be different is truly to be a bug-eyed monster.

We may read or write of totally different cultures, totally different ways of life, but we usually feel either hostility or amusement to anything that doesn't have a parallel in the present. Or we feel a slight touch of superiority to anything that isn't strictly human—much as we feel slightly superior to the peoples of Neanderthal times, to the New Mexican cliff dwellers, or even to the ancient Romans.

We have progressed, we say smugly.

But our race will continue to progress. Or at least to change. And change is usually taken as synonymous with progress—at least by those who have brought about the changes. Probably the barbarians who overthrew the Roman Empire thought that they had made a vast improvement on the scheme of things; they certainly wouldn't have gone along with the modern evaluation given their era—the Dark Ages.

Yet, even if we're culture bound, tied to today, we can still look forward toward tomorrow—a tomorrow that may be infinitely better than the present, or infinitely worse, but which will certainly be different . . .

If that's escapist, then all science fiction readers are escapist. And glad of it, too.

BY the way, if you're interested in a view of tomorrow that's really dissimilar to the usual stf preview, there's a book out that I think you'll like very much. (Plug.) It's called "Frontiers in the Sky", published by Shasta, and written by the one-and-only Rog Phillips, my ever-lovin' spouse . . . Sure I'm prejudiced in its favor—but I'm pretty darn sure you will be too!

As you already know, IMAGINATION is now put out every six weeks instead of every eight weeks. This means that from now on we'll be able to catch up with our reviewing of fanzines. Up until now there have been just too many to include in a bi-monthly column. So if your zine hasn't been reviewed it's only been because of this long interval between issues of Madge. That will be changed from now on, of course, and when Madge becomes a full monthly—every four weeks, it will be even better.

In the meantime, here are the fanzines.

\* \* \*

First off, there are a couple of letters this time about fan clubs—one old, one new. Dave Hammond (alias Stephen Craig, fan writer for such zines as Quandry) writes in about the PSFS—the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society. He also sends in a couple of issues of the PSFS News, which covers the local club's doings. It sounds like a very interesting organization, crammed full of stf talent.

Dave is the new club secretary, so if you're around Philadelphia and would like more information I suggest you write to him: Dave Hammond, 806 Oak St., Runnemede, New Jersey.

The new club this time is located

in the San Fernando Valley of Southern California. It's called the Space-warpers, and it plans to be really active, putting out its own fanzine. Any science fiction readers in the San Fernando Valley are invited to contact Charles Nuetzel, 16452 Moorpark St., Encino, Calif. His phone is STate 40281.

Good luck, Spacewarpers. And send along that fanzine when you get it started . . .

\* \* \*

**EUSIFANSO:** 10c; "An irregular periodical sponsored by the Eugene Science Fantasy Artisans and the Little Press of 146 East 12th Ave., Eugene, Oregon. It is published at intervals right on the interval and circulated thinly over the English speaking world! It goes primarily to science-fiction fans, a small but prominent percentage of whom could not find their niche in life with both hands and the aid of a lit candle. Contributions are welcome from all persons good enough and brave enough to stand the Floufine atmosphere."

The above description I lifted bodily off the editorial page of this fanzine, which is edited by Roscoe Wright and is always noteworthy for its format, its fine printing job, and its really unusual art work—mostly in two colors. The issue I have here features fiction such as Marje Blood's hilarious time-overlap story, "Two Ways From Sunday," articles, and a fanzine within a fanzine.

This last is a preview of a new publication by Henry Lewis, R. Faulkner, and REW. It's called "Concept," and it's going to be a most unusual little magazine, judging from the preview, anyway, with extremely imaginative artwork and poetry. It's going to be given out

free on request, too . . .

Don't miss Eusifanso, and be sure to inquire about the new Concept too.

\* \* \*

**OOPSLA:** 10c; published every six weeks, Gregg Calkins, 761 Oakley St., Salt Lake City 16, Utah.

Shelby Vick's regular feature, "Dear Alice," is intriguing as usual. It's in the form of a letter to "a mythical girl in a not-too-mythical land," and this time it concerns itself with what happens when Shelby says good-morning to a Grulzak—a rather unsociable two-headed something or other.

Then there's Lemuel Craig's article on "The Organizing Instinct," or why do fans so often get together into fan clubs that serve no useful purpose? A good coverage of various fan clubs, past and present, and their reason for being formed and then being broken up . . .

Why not send in *your* dime and see for yourself what Oopsla will come oop with next . . .

\* \* \*

**THE OUTLANDER:** 15c; Rick Sneary, 2962 Santa Ana St., South Gate, Calif. This fanzine is published irregularly by the Outlander Society, a group of fans who originally lived near but not in Los Angeles. Now they live all over the place, including, besides Los Angeles, such spots as Scotland, England, and Honolulu.

Being an Outlander myself I can't very well review this zine impartially. But why try? It's really a fine issue on its own—the third anniversary issue edited by Rick Sneary and Len Moffatt. The mimeoing is especially good this time, so you

won't have any of that all too frequent mimeo eyestrain reading it.

Some of the stories, articles, and poetry I think you'll like especially: John Van Couvering's "The Man Who Made a Better Glug," a gentle satire on navy life. Then there's Alvin Taylor's free verse section, "Orpheus in Transit," which includes some really good modern poetry. I liked best the poem that starts out:

*the specific pacific  
is a railroad train  
hopping along lamely  
on three legs  
carrying business men  
hither and thither  
at tremendous speed . . .*

Also there's Rick's transcript of a wire recorded interview with Rog Phillips. Sample: *Rick*: Tell me, to what do you attribute your great success as a writer?

*Rog*: Writing.

Then there's an Intimate Space Confessions story by Mari Wolf . . .

And a lot more too. It's really a fine anniversary issue. Send in for it and see . . .

\* \* \*

VARIANT WORLDS: 15c; published irregularly; Variants, 1234 Utica Ave., Brooklyn 3, New York. Sheldon Deretchin is the editor of this fanzine, which contains a little of everything that's on the humorous side.

My favorite article in this issue was the one by J. and H. Schaumburger on "How to Become a BNF." A BNF, in case you're wondering, is a Big Name Fan—one of those famous, glittering creatures that put out well-known fanzines and are looked up to by new stf neophytes . . .

The rules advanced are quite hilarious, in a gently cynical sort of way. And who knows? Maybe the

method outlined would work . . .

On the more serious side is Wilkie Conner's article, "Science Fiction, or Science Fiction?" Wilkie comes out for fiction first, and gives his reasons for doing so.

The Variants have a lot to offer, so why not write in for a copy of their zine and sample it yourself?

\* \* \*

THE JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION: 25c; published irregularly, Charles Freudenthal, 1331 W. Newport Ave., Chicago 13, Illinois. Charles Freudenthal and Edward Wood have put out an amateur magazine dealing comprehensively and critically with science fiction as a field. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say with science fiction as a literary art form.

The issue I have delves into many aspects of that field. Edward Wood reviews the first twenty-five years of AMAZING STORIES, and really covers the magazine's history thoroughly. I know I learned a lot from that article. Also Freudenthal continues an analysis of Ray Bradbury and his place in literature.

The Journal is not a light fanzine in any sense of the word. It's a "little" magazine, really. But if you're interested in the background of science fiction, and especially if you're interested in the medium as an art form and as a part of our twentieth century life, you'll find here a lot of useful information, as well as a lot of food for thought.

\* \* \*

SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER: 20c; published bi-monthly at 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif.

The Advertiser, as its name im-

plies, is published primarily for the benefit of the collectors, publishers, and booksellers of science fiction and fantasy. In fact, the magazine is a flat *must* for collectors.

But the Advertiser is much more than just a trading journal. It always contains some of the best and most carefully thought out articles on science fiction to be found in the entire field. It also always runs really fine artwork—such as Morris Scott Dollens' covers.

The issue I have here is one I know you especially won't want to miss. Not if you're at all interested in A. E. Van Vogt's works, at any rate. For in this issue Arthur J. Cox has the first of two articles on Van Vogt. "Deux Ex Machina," a study of VV as a writer, as a thinker, and as a person.

The review covers much more ground than do so many such studies which merely list a writer's works and delve superficially into his themes and motivations. Cox shows Van Vogt's style, his ways of building characterization, the underlying assumptions and attitudes behind his work—as well as a means for determining the assumptions and attitudes behind the works of other writers. It's really a fascinating study, so much so that I wish the concluding installment was out.

Both parts will have been published by the time you read this. So why don't you send in 40c and ask for both issues?

\* \* \*

CRITI-Q: 10c; Dave Hammond (Stephen Craig), 806 Oak St., Rutherford, New Jersey. Dave's brought out a fine new fanzine here. The issues I have—the first two—deal largely with Robert E. Howard's life and works.

Dave reprints some of Howard's poetry, and it's extremely moving, especially if, like me, your knowledge of the writer has been hitherto limited to a couple of the Conan stories.

Stephen Craig himself has a short story of the weird genre, "Promised Land." Very good, too. And as for the future of Criti-Q, judging from its lineup for future issues it's going to get even better. So if you are a Howard, Lovecraft, C. A. Smith, or Brackett fan especially, you most certainly won't want to miss this fanzine. Send in your dime and see what I mean.

\* \* \*

ASMODEUS: 15c; Alan H. Pesetsky, 1475 Townsend Ave., New York 52, New York. Pesetsky and Henry W. Chabot co-edit this fanzine, which is chock full of some very amusing articles, as well as some very informative ones.

For instance, there's Jerome Bixby's hilariously funny treatise on Space Madness, complete with illustrations of the malady and its effects upon its victims. Then Mack Reynolds writes about Fred Brown, and also about some interplanetary slang. And Robert Silverberg continues his future history of fandom series—but how dare you kill off my Rog, Bob? I wanna keep him, for some reason . . .

But the one article that intrigued me the most was Robert Rosen's "Lycanthropy"—which means literally, "Wolf-man." The were-wolf legends have always fascinated me, probably because of my name. Who knows, maybe some of my ancestors were burned at the stake back in the Middle Ages!

\* \* \*

**VIEWS IN SF:** 10c; Circulation manager, Menasha Brodie, 3315 Pinkney Road, Baltimore 15, Maryland. This fanzine is the monthly bulletin of the Baltimore Science Fiction Forum.

The current issue contains, besides book and magazine reviews and club news, an interesting article by Fischel Pearlmutter on "The Effect of the Atomic Bomb on Science Fiction." His conclusions are that the bomb changed the content of s-f stories much less than it changed the number of people reading them and the number of media in which they appear—as witness the prevalence of s-f in slick magazines, on radio and TV, and in anthologies. But to the old-time fan, the bomb had been a commonplace story long before it became a reality. It's really a well-thought article.

\* \* \*

**INDIANA FANTASY:** 20c; quarterly; Ray Beam, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Indiana.

**CENTAURIAN:** dues 50c yr.; Bob Farnham, 104 Mt. View, Dalton, Ga.

**BLACKLIST:** free; Gordon L. Black, 12095 Rosemary, Detroit 5, Mich.

**BURROUGHS BULLETIN:** free; Vernal Coriell, Box 652, Pekin, Illinois.

**FANTASY-TIMES:** 10c; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32d Ave., Flushing, N. Y.

**FANTASY TRAILS:** 10c; Andre Von Bell, 2221 Parkway Dr., Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

**GEM TONES:** G. M. Carr, 5319 Ballard Ave., Seattle 7, Wash.

**IMAGINATIVE COLLECTOR:** 15c; Russell K. Watkins, 203 E. Wampum Ave., Louisville 9, Ky.

**OPERATION FANTAST:** 75c yr.; Philip J. Rasch, 567 Erskine Dr., Pa-

cific Palisades, Calif.

**NEWS LETTER:** 15c; Bob Tucker, P.O. Box 702, Bloomington, Ill.

**NEWSCOPE:** 5c; Fandomain Press, 43 Tremont St., Malden 48, Mass.

**SOL:** 10c; Dave Ish, 914 Hammond Rd., Ridgewood, N. J.

**STFANEWS:** 5c; Clyde Hanback, 224 Broad St., Newark, N. J.

**AVALONIAN:** \$1.50, Lilith Lorraine, 626½ N. Pierce St., New Orleans, La.; the annual yearbook of Avalon World Arts Academy.

**STRAIGHT UP:** Fandomain Press, 37 Willows Ave., Tremorfa, Cardiff. Glam. S. Wales, G. B. Cost, one program for six issues.

**STF TRADER:** 5c; Box 3, Tyro, Kansas.

**UTOPIAN NEWS LETTER:** free, R. J. Banks, Jr., 111 S. 15th St., Corsicana, Texas.

**CANADIAN FANDOM:** no price listed; Ned McKeown, 1398 Mt. Pleasant Rd., Toronto 12, Ontario, Canada.

**CONFUSION:** free; Box 493, Lynn Haven, Florida.

**BALTIMORE STFORUM:** 5c; Menasha Brodie, 3315 Pinkney Rd., Baltimore, Md.

**CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION:** 10c; Intergalactic Publications, Box 1529, Grand Central Station, New York 17, N. Y.

\* \* \*

As you can see from the long list of fanzines that weren't reviewed, it would take quite a bit of space to cover them adequately. But as I stated previously, now that Madge has converted from a bi-monthly to a six-weekly publication I'll be able to catch up on the backlog.

So keep on sending in those fanzines to me, Mari Wolf, at FANDORA'S BOX, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill.

—Mari Wolf

# Letters

## from the Readers

NEW THORNE SMITH

Dear Ed:

Oh wondrous, joyous day! I've finally found an author who replaces Thorne Smith! Someone who looks at life while hanging from his knees on a merry-go-round. Someone who says let the blows fall where they may—it's a wonderful life!

Three months of science fiction reading and I strike laughing gas!

To come down from the clouds, I think you have a swell magazine. Madge is one of my favorites. And you can see that "Toffee" is too. The Charles Myers story in the July issue really got me.

As to stf in general I like it because it uses four and five syllable words and isn't geared to a five-year-old mind. It's something a person can really get his mental teeth into!

Adee Smith  
Rt. 2

Payette, Idaho

*Now that you've discovered TOFFEE we'll bet you'll never want to miss another of the little lady's escapades—and neither would we! ... wlh*

SEARCH ENDED

Dear Ed:

Science fiction is something comparatively new to me. I believe it is what I have been searching for in many years of reading. I now read every science fiction magazine I can find—and I have already come to the conclusion that IMAGINATION is the best of them!

Time machine and interdimensional stories have, until now, been my favorites, (SO MANY WORLDS AWAY . . . was very cleverly done) but now I have a new love—TOFFEE.

Thorne Smith, to me, was a God. After exhausting the supply of his works I sadly assumed I had nothing further to look forward to. But now the July issue of Madge has happily brought Charles F. Myers into my life in the form of NO TIME FOR TOFFEE! That two minds should operate so identically, and two styles be so similar, is the ninth wonder of the world. I would like to read everything Mr. Myers has ever written—and certainly will not want to miss anything new of his. Can you help me out?—I intend to buy five copies of any issue of Madge with a Myers story!

Jack Blanchard  
232 Goundry St.  
North Tonawanda, N. Y.

We first introduced TOFFEE stories in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES while we edited that magazine. Seven stories appeared there, as follows:

I'LL DREAM OF YOU, January '47

YOU CAN'T SCARE ME!, March '47

TOFFEE TAKES A TRIP, July '47

TOFFEE HAUNTS A GHOST November, '47

THE SPIRIT OF TOFFEE, November, '48.

TOFFEE TURNS THE TRICK, February, '49

THE SHADES OF TOFFEE, June '50

There have been two TOFFEE stories in Madge so far, since we brought the series along with us from FA; they are, THE VENGEANCE OF TOFFEE, February '51, and of course the cover story in the July issue just past. The June 1951 issue of Madge had a long Myers story entitled, DOUBLE IDENTITY, but it was not a "Toffee" yarn. Back issues of Madge are still available at 35c each so if you want any let us know. (If you subscribe you can include back issues as part of your subscription.) As for the future, we have Charlie Myers working on a new TOFFEE novel right now! . . . . . wth

TOFFEE SOS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

This is an urgent SOS to all TOFFEE fans who can tell me the title of the TOFFEE story in which Marc and Toffee take pills that make them children—physically, but still adult mentally! It was a hilarious story but I've lost track of both title and magazine in which it appeared!

Wayne L. Fehr  
3320 Carlisle  
Covington, Ky.

The title is TOFFEE TURNS THE TRICK, Wayne. You'll find the issue and magazine listed at left . . . wth

### NO POLICY GOOD POLICY!

Dear Bill:

I have just finished reading the July issue of Madge. Boy! If there's anything I like it's a story about my favorite gal, TOFFEE! Charlie Myers sure writes like Thorne Smith—and that's a compliment.

Up until now the only issue of Madge I read was the first one back in 1950. I just didn't realize what I was missing! You have a fine magazine, one of the best. I like your policy of not having a policy; it keeps the magazine "alive", and you look forward to the next issue.

Just continue as you are—you've added a steady reader to Madge.

Bill Fischer  
7611 S. Green St.  
Chicago 20, Ill.

Glad to have you in the gang, Bill. You watch the coming issues—we've really got some great yarns coming up . . . . . wth

### WASTED ISSUE . . . ?

Dear Ed:

I've just finished reading the July issue and it's made such a vivid impression that I'm compelled to write you. Why have you done such a horrible thing to my erstwhile esteemed Madge? This issue could almost have been smelled from Illinois!

In NO TIME FOR TOFFEE, Myers, as usual, has managed to create a hodgepodge out of what might have been a good plot in other, more cap-

able hands. He crowded too many events, facets and characters into even 28,000 words and the effect left me breathless, confused, and emotionally fatigued.

THE RELUCTANT HERO would have been quite in place, had it appeared in a medical journal. It read like a case history—and a very dull one.

THIS WORLD IS OURS! was the best story—but only by comparison. After reading the first two this one gave me false hopes, and built me up for an awful letdown.

I won't even mention the title of the next one, the worst insult of all. When I want a technological manual on linotype machines I'll get one at a bookstore.

SO MANY WORLDS AWAY was a poorly written tale with an over-worked done-to-death plot.

With this issue you have cannoned down the ladder so far that subsequent issues can only be better, never worse. Both the money and time I spent on this issue were wasted. Unless your next issue is 1000% better you've lost a reader.

Alan G. Davis  
132 Hudson St.  
Northboro, Mass.

Hey, Alan, you sure you just weren't mad at the world in general when you read the July issue? Honestly, if a TOFFEE story doesn't get a laugh out of you, we're at a loss to understand just what you want. Also, we thought the Dan Galouye story was as fine a piece of mood science fiction as we've ever read. We don't expect every story in the issue to ring the bell with every reader—indeed, we try to provide a variety of yarns to please everybody in one way or another. When you "thumb down" an entire issue we suspect you were just hard to please that day. As to future issues, you'll be read-

ing some great yarns, so stick around! . . . . . wth

#### TOP OF THE LIST

Dear Bill:

To start off I'd like to state that Madge is the first stf magazine I look for when I make my periodical trip to the newsstand. I am happy to say that the July issue is one of the best I've seen yet.

NO TIME FOR TOFFEE was my first taste of Charles Myers' talents, and already I want a second helping. My sides are still sore from laughing.

After reading THIS WORLD IS OURS! I guess I'll be suspicious of all stf magazines which favor the alien. The story was very good.

Usually I don't care for fantasy, only straight stf, but THE MISCHIEVOUS TYPESETTER was really good.

As usual I enjoyed FANDORA'S BOX. Incidentally, speaking of Mari Wolf, I failed to find the "conceit" Mrs. Learn spoke of in her letter criticizing Mari's autobiography in INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR. Maybe somebody else can tell me where it is!

Larry Tóuzinsky  
2911 Minnesota Ave.  
St. Louis 18, Mo.

Maybe they can, Larry, but it's got us beat. Like you, we enjoyed Mari's biog, and of course, her column is always interesting . . . . . wth

#### THE LADY PROTESTS!

Dear Ed:

I must take exception to the description in your July issue by Charles Myers (in his autobiography) of a native Californian: "hates . . . small rooms, books of etiquette, bromides . . . likes with a passion an

unobstructed view, loud, loose clothing, lots of activity, people who laugh a lot and anything he can eat in his fingers at a drive-in . . . he'll show up at your party wearing a plaid shirt, and jeans, and never have the slightest inkling that he doesn't look just as natty as everyone else."

I greatly admire Mr. Myers' writing ability and his creation, TOFFEE, but as a native of that Paris of the West, San Francisco, I insist that he is confused in his conception of the characteristics indigenous to the native Californian and ask that his description at least be qualified to: genus Southern. The true Californian, genus Sanfranciscana, does not confuse hyperthyroid activity and meaningless laughter with quiet conviviality and good fellowship . . . he has no need for a book of etiquette since the rules of social grace and hospitality are his patrimony as the natural heir of the conquistadores . . . it is true he dislikes confinement, and why not? for his habitat is the rolling hills and the ocean his veranda.

As for that gastronomical excrescence, the drive-in eatery—for shame! In the city of epicures—the home of Omar Khayyam' and the old Poodle Dog, the birthplace of the Green Goddess Salad and the Martini cocktail—every native is a gourmet. The true Californian despairs the "chili dog" and the "ham on rye". He likes with a passion Cioppino and Pizza, Sukiayaki, Gee Bao Gai and Foo Yee, Kouzou Kzartma and Sash-lek, Oysters Rockefeller, Cheese Blintzes, and Shrimp Remoulade.

Mr. Myers—we of the romantic, the fabulous, the cosmopolitan city by the Golden Gate protest!

Elizabeth R. Lewis  
1871 17th Ave.  
San Francisco, Cal.

We're out to lunch! . . . wlh

## AFTER NINE YEARS . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

My first letter though I've read science fiction since I was nine years old—and that makes a good nine years of reading. In that time I have never so thoroughly enjoyed a story that I found myself writing to an editor. But here I am!

TOFFEE was as funny as it could possibly be—I howled through four periods and lunch at school, to the raised eyebrows of friends, teachers, and typewriter repairmen. They raised even further when they saw what I was reading. No one seems able to understand why I read science fiction, and yet once I force a friend or acquaintance to try a story or two, they invariably become addicted! My husband's my latest conquest. He loved TOFFEE as much as I.

I noticed that some of the "fans" were down on anyone who preferred factual or logical science fiction. By logical I mean the inclusion of time travel, the realistic handling of planet colonization, and logical analysis of various situations and reactions of beings. I don't mean the pageantry and utterly impossible characterization—though who can say what is impossible? At any rate, no matter how "fantastic" TOFFEE may be, she's wonderful!

THIS WORLD IS OURS! was good, and THE RELUCTANT HERO was even better.

Sherry Payne Kohler  
323 E. 13th St.  
New York, N.Y.

*That's our girl, Sherry, get all your friends reading science fiction, and there's no better introduction than a TOFFEE story. What's impossible? Only those people who don't read stf! They just don't know what they're missing . . . wlh*

## A TV GRIPE

Dear Ed:

While I'll miss the 10th World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago in September, I'd like to pass along a gripe which I hope somebody on the convention committee will put on the agenda.

I'm a television producer here in Louisville, and it really blisters me that science fiction has been sluffed off by radio and TV. Sure, the networks have nobly experimented with 2000 PLUS on radio and OUT THERE on TV. But both have been shifted around, dropped, or hidden in the back attic like somebody's idiot child. There was some talk of a full hour of OUT THERE for CBS-TV as a (get this) summer replacement, but after some swell reviews of the opener . . . nothing. Sure, Louisville gets (Migawd!) CAPTAIN' VIDEO and FLASH GORDON, which is great if you happen to be a six year old.

You can say that being on the "inside" of television I'd be in a better position to do something about stf on the air better than an outsider; sadly, there are "big wheels" in TV who run the cart, and I'm not one of them. I figure that a convention of writers, editors, publishers, and fans is in a much better position to put on pressure—especially since science fiction is the adopted daddy of TV for lo these many years. How's chances of daddy doing a little spanking?

NO TIME FOR TOFFEE in the July issue of Madge was my first TOFFEE story and I certainly enjoyed it. Charlie Myers is carrying on the Thorne Smith tradition in great style.

Bob Pilkington  
1915 S. 1st St.  
Louisville 8, Ky.

*You've got a legitimate gripe, Bob, but we wonder just how much effect pressure by the science fiction world will have on the TV bigwigs. Program decisions are made in fancy-paneled sound-proofed offices where ideas can't cut through the cigar smoke. In many cases it seems to us that more attention is given preparing the commercials than the actual programs. We agree, something should be done about stf in TV besides the CAPTAIN VIDEO type. Perhaps some TV people will attend the convention. If so, they'll hear about it, never fear. And in the meantime, keep on plugging stf in Louisville. Every little bit helps. And it wouldn't hurt if all the science fiction fans who want good stf programs on TV wrote letters to the major networks saying so. A deluge of letters might open a few closed doors . . . . . with*

## NOT A WET NOODLE!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

If you ever change Madge I hope they give you fifty lashes with a wet noodle! IMAGINATION is the best science fiction magazine and it will stay that way if you leave it just as it is. The only improvements you could make is to put the magazine on a full monthly schedule, which I understand you will do shortly. Since I started reading science fiction last year I have become a staunch fan and you have helped make me one.

I bought the July issue of Madge today and while I have not read the stories yet I have read the various departments and that satisfied me for the moment. I'm looking forward to some great reading although the July number will have to go some to beat the May issue which was your best issue to date.

In regard to fan terminology, what is a fanzine? I've followed FANDORA'S BOX but I still don't get it. Also, if there are any fan clubs in this vicinity I'd like them to contact me.

Richard Jacob  
3294 West 3800 South  
Salt Lake City 7, Utah

*Change Madge? Not a chance, Dick. We like the little lady just as she is! Of course, there will be improvements as we go along—monthly publication for one instead of every six weeks . . . A fanzine is fan talk for fan magazine. Mari Wolf reviews a great many of them in her column.*

. . . wlh

#### TOPS, HE SAYS!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The July issue of IMAGINATION is the second issue for me and I must say that NO TIME FOR TOFFEE is the funniest story I have ever read.

A tip of my hat to Mr. Myers for his wit and imagination bringing us science-fantasy in this amusing way. I hope that we will have another of his stories soon. To insure myself that I won't miss it please enter my subscription. And if I may say so, "Madge, you're tops with me!"

Louis R. Buchwald  
2917 5th Ave., S.  
Minneapolis 8, Minn.

*You'll be reading further adventures of TOFFEE in an early issue, Louis. In the meantime you can look forward to many other fine stories. Speaking of subscribing, why don't the rest of you readers turn to page 162 and take advantage of the bonus subscription offer. Remember, subscribers get their copies ahead of newsstand publication; copies of Madge are always mailed flat in protecting envelopes—and besides you'll*

*be saving money with a subscription. Incidentally, Madge makes a nice gift for any season of the year. So do yourself—or your friends a favor—with a subscription . . . wlh*

#### SHORT BUT SWEET

Dear Ed:

I like it! I LIKE it!

Clara Cummings  
705½ Pike St.  
Seattle 1, Wash.

P.S. Now how is that for a letter? I'm speaking of the July issue, of course—and all the others too for that matter. What a laugh TOFFEE handed me. I might add that the cover was certainly pleasing. You should have your puss (as you call it) plastered on more covers . . . very nice to look at!

*Aw, shucks, Clara, bet you say that to all the boys! . . . wlh*

#### NAUGHTY WORDS?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

This is not a matter of family discipline. When Marge first appeared she seemed like a nice girl, trying to do her best to make a good name for herself. I've been shocked therefore to note a growing toughness in her. She's getting pretty careless about her language in particular. Outright profanity, as on page 28 of the July number just doesn't seem right for the young lady—and she seems to care nothing about using plenty of helzandams. Rather shocking indeed . . . so much so that she ought to have her little mouth washed out with editorial soap and water. In fact, if she doesn't mend her ways I'll just have to tell her she can't see me anymore!

Porter C. Redway  
426 S.W. 2nd St.  
Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

After giving Madge's vocabulary a close scrutiny we find that while she is not a purist in the absolute sense, neither is she an exponent of Anglo-Saxon terminology as you infer. By and large we'd say the little lady is well mannered and acceptable in the best of circles . . . . . wlh

### SAUCER AD LEGIT?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

This is my first letter to a publication, after business hours, that is, but I just had to write. I have doted on Thorne Smith for years and have read his books over and over again. I picked up your July issue the other day and read Charles F. Myers' NO TIME FOR TOFFEE! Here at last is a worthy successor to The Man. Norman Matson isn't in the same league. Myers is Thorne Smith to a T—and in my book that's no crime.

I'm curious about the "Flying Saucer" ad you ran in that issue. Ray Palmer lays it on pretty thick and I'd label the ad a phoney except your advertising policy appears to be restricted, only accepting ads pertaining to science fiction and of interest to fans. Any one with as commendable a policy as this I don't feel would accept disreputable advertising.

Lorne Coutts  
1820 Keele St.

Toronto, Ont., Canada

We can personally vouch for the integrity of the publisher of the Flying Saucer book advertised—Ray Palmer. Ray has been associated with us in the science fiction field for many years and he's about as honest and grand a person as you'll find on God's Green Earth. As to the veracity of the book, well, we were editors together at AMAZING STORIES when the flying saucer mys-

tery first broke. We saw Ray studiously collect all available information over a period of years pertaining to the subject, and believe us, some of the information was rather staggering. Palmer became the country's greatest authority on flying saucers—so much so that various high government agencies have kept in close touch with him. We'll stick our editorial necks out and state that whatever is known about Flying Saucers—and even perhaps some that isn't generally known—Ray Palmer has documented in his files. The book he is bringing out with Kenneth Arnold, the pilot who first sighted saucer-shaped objects, is, to the best of our knowledge, an authoritative collection of facts. If you've got four bucks to spare and are interested in the subject, you'll get more than your money's worth. (For any readers who missed Ray's announcement on the new book, you can contact him at Rt. 2, Box 36, Amherst, Wisc.) . . . . . wlh

### AUTHENTIC NOTE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

This is my first letter to any magazine, but after reading two issues of IMAGINATION I had to write in my approval.

I'm new to TOFFEE, and I'm delighted with her! More, please! THIS WORLD IS OURS! and THE RELUCTANT HERO were also very good. I just wish that Madge were twice as big and came out twice as often.

Also, the new back cover feature is a swell idea, lends an authentic note to the whole magazine. But then, anything IMAGINATION does is ok by me.

Dorothy Cameron  
71 School St.  
Glen Cove, L.I., N.Y.

Glad you like the cover feature, Dorothy. It's already proven a very popular feature. We can't promise you more TOFFEE soon, but twice as big and twice as often—that takes time. We're working on it! . . . wlh

## GREAT DISCOVERY

Dear Bill:

This letter will arrive late for your current letter section but I did want to comment on the May issue.

The highlight of the issue was, of course, the outstanding combination of cover picture and lead story. That cover seems to get better every time I look at it! And the story **TONIGHT THE SKY WILL FALL!** is the only case I can remember in which an editor went into raptures over an author he had discovered and I had to agree with him.

All the other stories were up to the high standard we have come to expect of **IMAGINATION**, with a special mention for **THE STRANGER**. The interior illustrations were well above average, especially the unsigned one for **THE STRANGER**. Another thing I particularly like about *Madge* is the way you give the word count for each story on the contents page. I'm one of those people who like to divide the number of words by my reading speed. Your system makes it easy. All the best for now.

Bob Shaw

70, Loopland Drive,

Belfast, Northern Ireland

Always glad to hear from you, Bob. The "unsigned" illo, as you call it, was by McCauley. Speaking of Dan Galouye, he'll have a fine story featured in an early issue—and a terrific cover along with it if we do say so! Watch for it . . . . wlh

## MORE DISCUSSIONS, PLEASE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The main reason this "first" letter is being written is because I have just read a letter in the July issue that I must comment upon, Peter Cusack's.

Mr. Cusack states, "I feel that this whole business of fan clubs . . . is highly ridiculous." While I feel he goes too far, he certainly has a good point. Many readers, like myself, read the good science fiction magazines for enjoyment and not as members of a club simply to write letters to the editor and get into print.

There certainly is a place for fan clubs and departments, but not to the exclusion of non-participating readers. There should be a department for letters from people who have something to say besides rating the stories.

We have all read the stories and formed our own opinions, so why print so many letters with similar comments? Why not try a discussion department for the readers to give their views on some thought-provoking subjects? I don't mean any controversy like *dianetics* in *ASF* or the *Shaver Mystery* in *AS* a few years ago; I mean some intelligent debatable concept.

*Madge* is a grand magazine—so please don't feel I'm complaining; the only complaint I have is with the letter department. I have gotten to know that there will be nothing but top-notch stories in *Madge*, and to show my confidence, I'm enclosing my subscription—*Madge* is the only science fiction magazine I have ever subscribed to, because it is so consistently good.

Ruth S Hanson  
100 Caterson Terrace  
Hartsdale, N.Y.

We certainly don't object to lively discussions, Ruth. But we leave that up to you—the reader. After all, this is your department. Care to start the ball rolling? . . . wlh

### A VIVID IMPRESSION

Dear Ed:

I have been an ardent science fiction fan ever since a friend gave me a copy of the anthology, *Adventures In Time and Space*. I've read all the anthologies since then and somehow I still prefer that first one.

I agree with Madge's readers when it comes to the quality of your magazine, even though I sometimes disagree with other choices concerning the "best" story in a particular issue. Usually there seems to be at least one first-place vote for every story so up until now I have never bothered to offer an opinion. But when there wasn't a yes, no, or maybe vote for THE DARK CAME OUT TO PLAY . . . in the May issue, I couldn't hold out any longer.

Never in my life have I read a story which has made as deep an impression on me. If I had read this story when I was still at the age where it is fashionable to be afraid of the dark you couldn't have gotten me to walk in the shade! I don't think it was the subject matter so much as the realistic style of writing. From now on my first job upon acquiring the latest issue of Madge will be to search frantically for a new Zenna Henderson story.

Breck McKinley  
Claremont Men's College  
Claremont, Cal.

We thought the Henderson story was a dilly too, Breck. We'll do our best to get the young lady in an early issue of Madge with another fine story. You hear that, Zenna? . . . wlh

### THOSE LONELY HOURS . . .

Dear Ed:

I would like to make a suggestion, if I may. I for one always find myself forgetting when subscriptions expire. It would be a great help to me (and I'm sure to other subscribers) if you could remind me before my subscription expires. In this way I can renew without missing an issue. If Madge already has this policy you are far in advance of any other magazine I have ever subscribed to.

Before closing I'd like to say that Madge is a terrific magazine. Out of this world, so to speak. It really helps to brighten this sailor's lonely hours at sea . . .

Ron Henry, Jr., SH2  
S-Div. U.S.S. Greenwich Bay  
(AVP-41)  
c/o FPO, New York, N.Y.

Don't worry about being reminded, Ron. Notice is always sent out in plenty of time for renewing without missing an issue. . . . wlh

### HOWLING GOOD TIME!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have been an avid reader of fantastic literature for quite some time now, but I only discovered IMAGINATION this past week. It's good—I like it!

I have always been partial to the real fantastic type of story; I don't care too much for interplanetary literature, because it is all so nearly fact. I enjoy the strictly impossible yarn.

TOFFEE is perfect. I have read most of this series and was wondering why she didn't appear any longer in *Fantastic Adventures*. Guess I'll just have to change my brand of magazine to keep up with her! She guarantees me a howling good time.

## LETTERS FROM THE READERS

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You'll find my subscription with this letter. That will show you how good I thought the July issue was!

Joyce Fileger  
104 Hall Ave.  
North Girard, Pa.

*You've got the right brand, now, Joyce. And you'll be seeing TOFFEE again shortly . . . . wlh*

YES SIR, SENSATIONAL!

Dear Bill:

You know, each issue of Madge is an improvement over the last, if that's possible. The only writer I don't care for is Dwight Swain.

But on to more pleasant things, such as the July issue. McCauley and Galouye were good—very good. Boy, what a cover! Loomis and Petaja were fair, and Swain's story was sickening, as usual. But I call Myers' TOFFEE novel sensational.

I have read only three other TOFFEE stories and I'm interested in getting others. I would also like to get the first three issues of Madge for my collection and issue No. 16 of OTHER WORLDS.

Hey, Bill, how about some stories by Russell, Merwin, Vance, Myers, Phillips, Clarke, and some joe named Hamling . . .

Tony Boldt  
118 Berkeley St.  
Toronto, Ont., Canada

*You say you don't like Swain's stories? Just wait until you read his next feature yarn—you'll change your mind in a hurry! Back issues of Madge are available at 35c each, or as part of your subscription. You will find a list of all the TOFFEE stories in the front of this section. As to the writers, you really want a new story by ye ed? Ok, so you're breaking our arm, we'll just have to do one . . . . wlh*

## DON'T BE A WELL SITTER!

Dear Ed:

This is my first letter to a science fiction magazine although I've been reading stf ever since I learned to read English. (That was in 1945. It took me 5 years to speak, read and write the English language.) I started reading Madge in September of 1951, and actually I would have written you sooner except I've been well satisfied.

A few days ago I picked up the first issue of Madge at a second-hand book store. After reading the first issue I must say it is really the best, every story was tops.

Those who don't read science fiction (and in particular Madge) don't know what they're missing. Such poor people are like "one who sits in a well to look at the sky."

I would like to see some Chinese-Americans write in to Madge. I have yet to see any letters from them in the reader section, yet I know many of them are fans.

If you print my letter please use both my American and Chinese names, and I'd like to hear from any interested fans.

John Leung  
(Gàm Wooi Leung)  
26-28 Pell St.  
Apt. 12  
New York 13, N.Y.

*Glad to hear from you, John, and we think you've got a good point about "well sitters"!*

*Well, gang, last issue your votes said that Dick Anderson of 4552 51st Ave., N.E., Seattle 5, Wash., wrote the most interesting letter. Dick thus gets his choice of any interior illo in the July issue. Nice going, Dick. We'll be seeing you again on September 30th when the next issue reaches your newsstand. Watch for it . . . . wlh*

# The December Issue Is **FREE**

## IF YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT!

That's what we said! You can have the December issue of IMAGINATION absolutely free if you'll subscribe today. And even better, you will receive your copy ahead of newsstand delivery — and each succeeding issue after that for the term of your subscription. What it amounts to is simply this: we want to build up our list of subscribers. It's growing every day but we want it to grow faster, and that's where you come in. You buy your copy at your newsstand and pay 35c; you know you're getting your money's worth in the best science-fiction & fantasy stories published anywhere. The point is, you can save a total of \$1.20 for twelve issues by subscribing, and even better, with this special announcement you can get an extra copy absolutely free — meaning a saving of \$1.55. Every dollar you save stays in *your* pocket, so why not help us achieve our goal with this bonus offer. And incidentally, if you want any back issues they can be included in your subscription. Just tell us which ones you want. Now before you forget, fill out the coupon below. OK?

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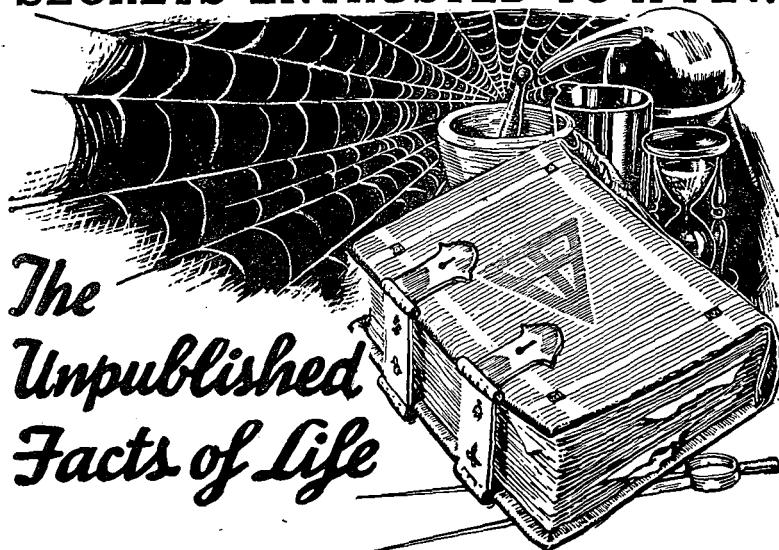
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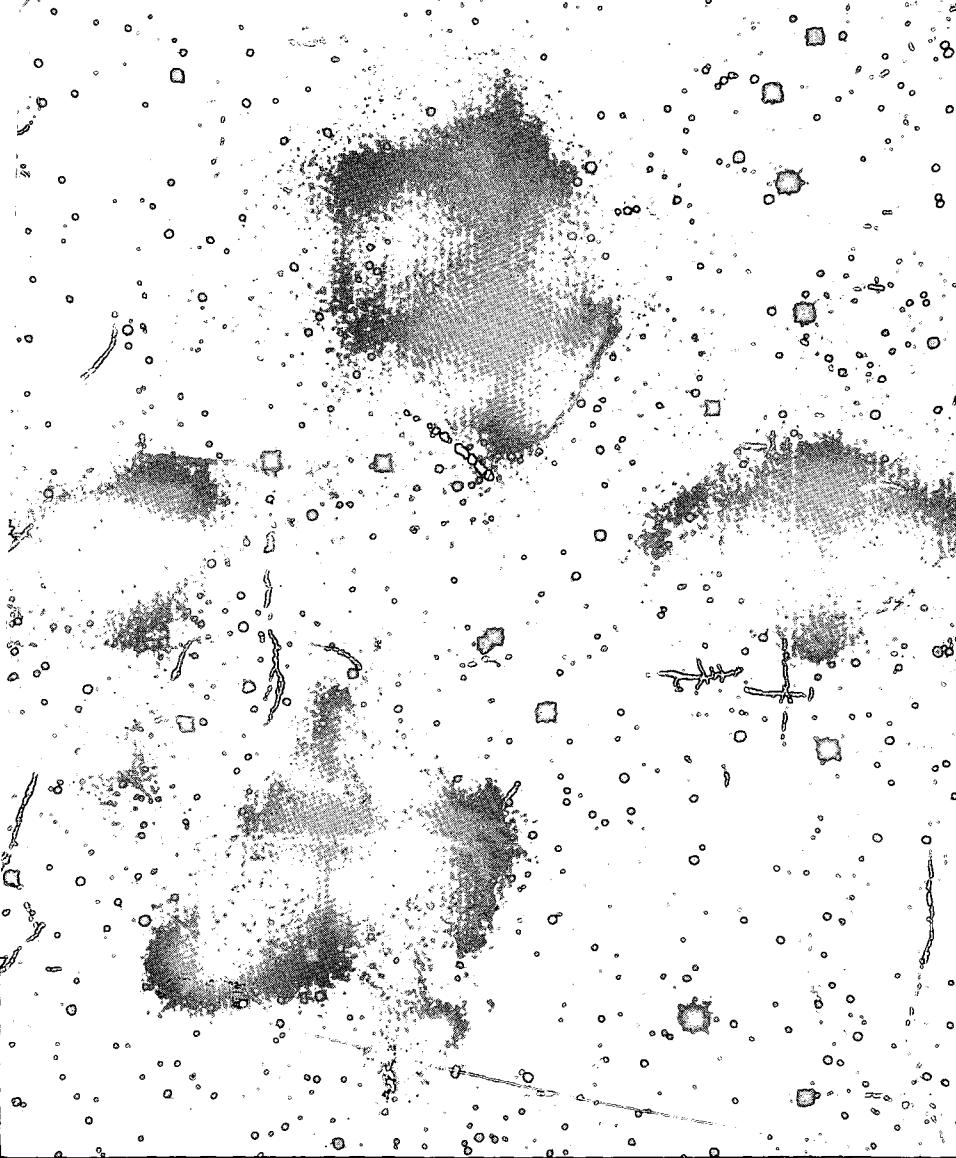
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